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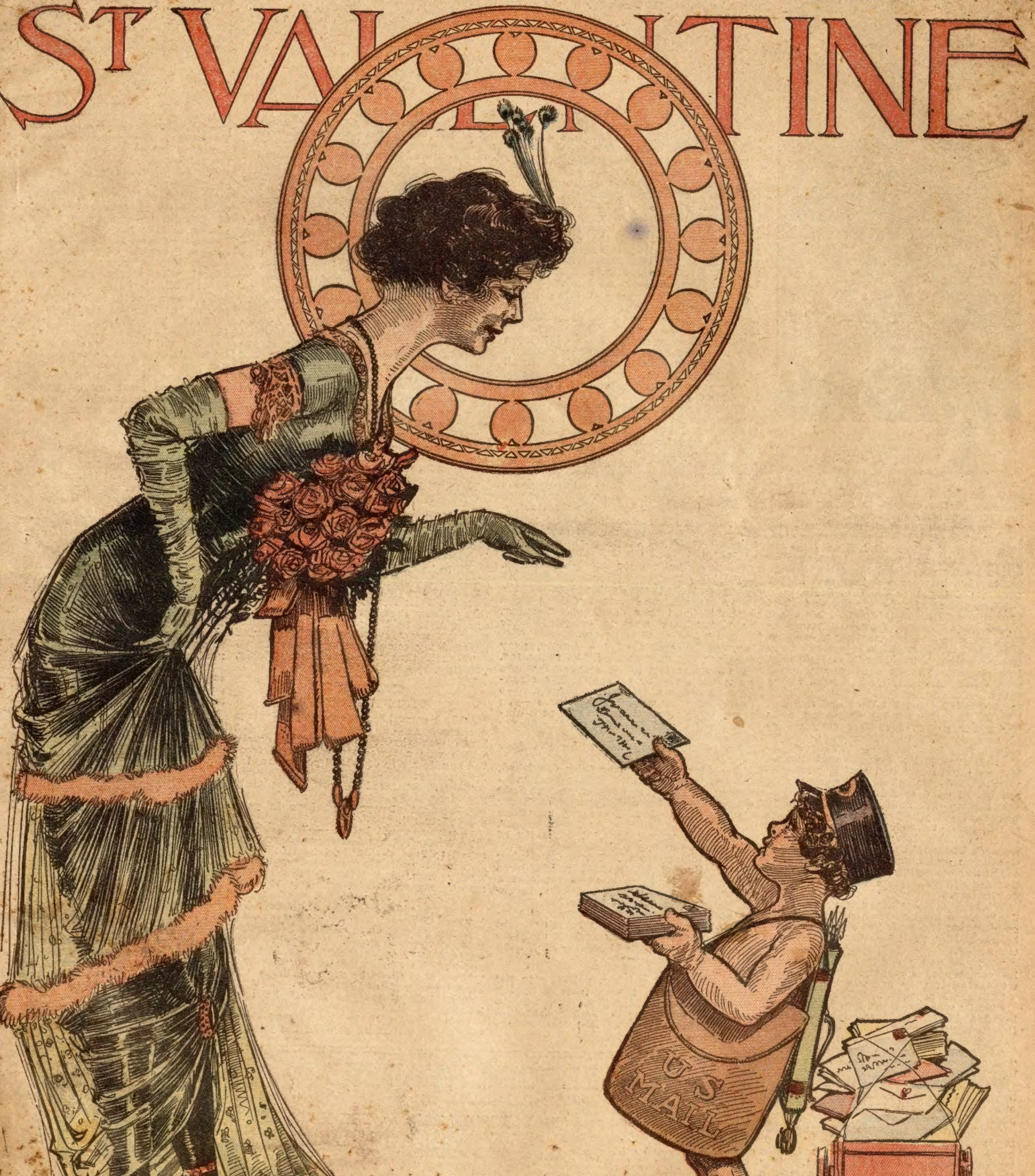
ST VALENTINE
U S MAIL
THEODORE HAMILTON 1914

THE SIGNS IN RE

Or, THE HERESIDE MYSTERY -:- By WILLIAM H. MANN

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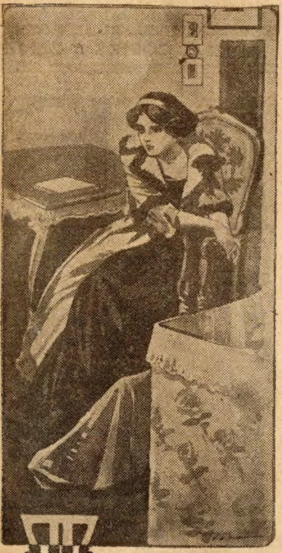
CHAPTER I.

THE FIRST BLOW



TO HAVE the interior of one's house mysteriously marked with strange characters that foretell death or great disaster of some kind, and not to know the identity of the enemy, is an experience that is singularly disconcerting.

I was with Borrowdale when the trouble began. We were both stockholders in the Terolake Zinc Mine in Pennsylvania, and when a meeting was called by its president, my friend asked me to visit him for a day or two before we started together for that State.

When the morning after my arrival at Hereside as Borrowdale called his great mansion and estate, I arose I was surprised not to find my wearing apparel as I had left it the night before when I retired. Being a bachelor I was orderly, but there was only confusion when I awakened. An intruder had been in my room.

Annoyed, I tried the door and found it locked, but the windows opening upon the upper piazza furnished easy means of access when the lower sashes were raised, as I had left them. It struck me that Borrowdale's system was faulty, but as my money and watch were untouched, I decided that, as a guest, I was not called upon to make complaint.

Dressing, and finding that the family were not yet up, I went for a walk in the delightful woods hard by, but when, half an hour later, I re-entered the house, I knew that something was amiss. Confusion and noise prevailed, and persons were scurrying to and fro in a manner far different from the peace of the day before.

While I stood staring, my host suddenly made his appearance from a room opening off the hall. At sight of me he laughed, though there was no mirth in the sound.

"Oh! So you are all right, Saywood," he commented abruptly. "I had been wondering if they had carried you off."

"They?" I repeated. "Who?"

"That's what we don't know. Burglars invaded the house last night and left things topsy-turvy."

"Did they take much?"

"Just what we are trying to learn. Thus far we don't find even a pin missing, which is strange. Money was scattered about, and the silver and jewels have never been looked to very well by our family. All these things were passed by by the singular thieves."

"I should say they were singular. It is my opinion that if I were to branch out as a burglar I should find valuables too fascinating to be left behind. Your thief must have been a playful sort of a fellow."

"Perhaps it was only a poor kind of a joke, or maybe malicious mischief," returned Borrowdale, thoughtfully. "But come and see the trail that was left."

He led the way to his sleepingroom, where I found about the same conditions that had prevailed in mine when I awakened, and here, too, were windows opening upon the upper piazza. From there he took me to other rooms, all of which had the same confusion. I was not an expert in analyzing housebreaking, but as I saw jewelry, watches, and money littering the articles of furniture at various points, I felt amazed at the way of the intruder. This did not prevent me from trying to use my eyes for detective signs, but I saw nothing. Finally Borrowdale paused.

"Well," he said, with a smile that contradicted itself, "what do you think of all this?"

"Do the other rooms show as little to work upon?" I asked.

"None of the others were touched. I mean that, if entered, they show no confusion."

"Yet they might have been entered with equal ease?"

"Yes."

I hesitated, ideas crowding my mind, though, except for one point, without much system. That point was definite and impressive, however.

"You have a big house here, Mr. Borrowdale," I presently remarked.

"Taken as a whole, very large. You see, there are three houses in one, all connected. The part we chiefly use was built twenty-five years ago; the middle wing, as we generally term it, sixty-five years previously, and the old wing, a hundred and thirty years ago. Different generations of the Borrowdales have builded, lived here, died, and left their heirs to carry matters on later."

"It's the size," I resumed, "that makes a certain thing possible. Have you noticed that the seven rooms invaded are all in a direct row?"

"Why, so they are! That's odd! Seven in a row, and none touched alongside."

He carried his hand to his head, wrestling with the surprise.

"My room is at one end of the row," he added slowly.

"And the other end?" I questioned.

"Reaches to the old wing. Naturally, they would leave that alone."

"Have you looked?"

"No, but there's nothing there but antique furniture and such things. An antiquarian might be interested—yes, certainly would be, but this burglar was rummaging newer sections. No valuables there in the way of portable wealth."

"I dare say I am foolish, but I would suggest that you see the old part of the house. Why not make a thorough job of it?"

"That's the proper way, of course. Come with me!"

We passed through the line of the seven rooms, and Borrowdale paused with his hand on a doorknob. Turning, he showed me a more composed face than he had carried before.

"For the credit of the family, pray overlook the dust in here," he requested. "We do not try to be elaborate where we never sleep or even sit. The cleanings-up occur a trifle infrequently. We men like that way, but a woman—you know their way. A good toast at a dinner party would be—Woman, the deadly foe of dust!"

Laughing lightly he swung the door open.

The room beyond was fully furnished, though nothing like bric-a-brac was there. A table, a bureau, and various chairs stood in orderly system, their style a survival of several generations back.

"Nothing wrong here," the master of the house added.

I was disappointed. I was developing a detective thirst, and it would have pleased me to see this room the eighth in the row, but it was not easy to establish such a fact at first sight.

"My housekeeper," Borrowdale pursued, "has a place for all furniture, and it's as if she used a yardstick and line each time she cleans to get the stuff back on its exact spot——"

"See here!"

I interrupted quickly, pointing to the floor. The carpet was dark with the original color and added age, with a sifting of dust over it. And in that dust was a repeated row of footprints reaching from door to door.

TO LEDGER READERS

– Be sure and read **"THE SIGNS IN RED; or, THE HERESIDE MYSTERY,"** in this issue. It is a splendid detective story. Look out for **"DICK O' THE DARK; or, THE NIGHT HAWKS OF '76,"** next week, also **"BLACKFACE, THE TERRIBLE,"** the strange story of a mountain lion. Most thrilling stories to follow will be **"THE BITING SWORD; or, FOR MADEMOISELLE'S SAKE,"** and **"THE PRINCESS ZETHENA; or, THE CALL OF THE SOUL."** We have a lot of wonderfully fascinating stories awaiting publication. Do not cease taking the Ledger or you will miss a constant weekly treat of good things.

"Hello!" Borrowdale exclaimed. "Here is something. Made lately, I think, and by men. I could have sworn nobody but myself and the women had been here in a year. Well, that's odd!"

"If you are in doubt, why not question your men servants to see if any have been here," I suggested.

"It would be a waste of time, for I'm sure none have. Here we get the housebreakers again. Two persons have crossed this space and then gone back on their tracks. I should say they were not of the so-called gentleman order, for the tracks are broad like those of laboring men."

I suggested locking the door behind us, so the footprints would not be effaced by any one else before we could measure them, and it was done.

"I suppose you will have an officer in to take up the case?" I added.

"Yes," Borrowdale answered quickly. "It is not my way to excuse such happenings, especially as the fellows may come again and do worse. Now, for the next room."

We passed through it, finding conditions much the same as in the former one, and my host paused with his feet at the next threshold.

"We are now coming to a room that meant much in old times," he explained. "It was the study of the builder of the old wing, the first of my race in this town. Here he spent his leisure hours, and they were many. He loved books, and dabbled in astronomy, medicine, alchemy, and several other sciences. A scholar, and this was his den."

He flung the door open. It was a room with the individuality of its long-dead master at every corner. Charts of the heavens hung on the walls, books and bottles lined the shelves, singular vessels of copper and other metals occupied the corners. The goods and chattles of the scientific scholar stood mute where once they had been responsive to their master's call.

"We have never disturbed anything since his death," said Borrowdale half-musingly. "In a way we feel veneration for what he had, for what interested him and engrossed his thoughts so much. Neither has any of his descendants made a practice of exhibiting this place. The more practical world has but scant sympathy for a man who caters to his head instead of his hands and feet, so we leave Roger Borrowdale's quarters alone."

While he talked I had done more than glance at the curios, and, after making sure that the footprints continued, I had swept a look around the place. Something I saw that did not have a look of age, and it held my attention. An impression grew swiftly upon me, and I grasped my companion by the arm.

"What's that?" I demanded quickly, pointing.

CHAPTER II.

THE FIVE KNIVES.

IT WAS something wholly out of place there. At one point a long-bladed knife was thrust deep into the wall, which was a lower wainscot, and from the handle a slip of folded paper dangled by a string.

"Well!" muttered Borrowdale, plainly surprised.

"Has that always been here in your day?" I asked.

"I never saw it before——"

He broke off, walked forward, and essayed to free the knife from the wood. A second pull was necessary, but it finally came out with a ring of the metal. He stood staring at it blankly.

"Very odd!" he muttered.

"And an odd-looking blade," I added.

"Yes. I would not have thought——"

Again he broke off, and his expression was grave as he gazed. The knife seemed to convey some meaning to him not apparent to me, and I wondered at his serious air. Then he aroused, broke the string, and unfolded the paper.

"Somebody's dubious joke!" he said irritably.

It was well said, but as he read there was no sign that he enjoyed the joke, if one there was. His forehead knit into deep lines and new gravity had him fast. He hesitated, and then passed the paper over to me.

"Read!" he directed curtly.

These are the words that I saw before me.

"This knife, one of five, is the messenger of the others. Three of the five will kill you and yours. The first fatal blow will remove Miami Borrowdale. As you sow, so will you reap."

Miami was my friend's daughter, and mention of her in this way stirred me to indignation and anger.

"A very poor joke, indeed!" I exclaimed.

"Is it a joke, Saywood?" he asked quickly.

"What else can it be? The day of the secret bravo is happily past, and even if it were otherwise, why should anybody aspire to do such an infamous thing? You and I may possibly have enemies, though I know of none, but Miss Borrowdale—impossible!"

"It is not said that the grudge is against her. Scoundrels sometimes strike those they hate through loved ones. Still, as you have said, I know of absolutely nobody who can have reason to hate me. Why, of course not! Pshaw! I am foolish to give this a serious thought. Of course, it is the supposed humor of some empty-headed rascal who would really hesitate to harm a blind mouse."

He was about to tear the writing into pieces, but I stayed his hand.

"No!" I objected. "Men who are threatened make a great mistake in parting with what evidence they have. Pass this over to a detective, and let him get at the bottom of the business."

"You are right, and I'll follow your advice. Three fatal knives, it says. That must mean my daughter, my aunt, Mrs. Ellett, and myself, for we are the only inmates of the house besides the servants. But why do I think about it? A very poor joke, as you say."

"Certainly!"

With this I slapped him jovially on the back. This was not like me, for I detest the habit, but it was proof of my sober, silent questioning that I went to the extreme.

We resumed our explorations, and were able to trace the strangers to the north end of the old wing, where they had apparently made their entrance by prying up a window.

It was not until we had started back, this time taking a different side of the old house, that we saw any of the confusion that had been so clear in the new building. As I afterward learned, the last room to be examined was the sleepingroom of the old astronomer, and it lay next to the study. We entered.

Then it was that we had our fresh start. Utter confusion prevailed. The small supply of furniture was piled here and there, and the carpet had been wrenched clear of the floor and was cast into a corner.

"More wanton mischief!" I said indignantly.

Borrowdale breathed a deep sigh and said nothing.

"Malicious disturbance," I added. "Nothing else would make a man tear this room almost to pieces, for there are no modern valuables here——"

I stopped short. Borrowdale was staring at the wall, and as I directed my gaze the same way, I did not need to ask at what. Wainscoting extended four feet upward from the floor, and it was dark with age. Upon it was a mark in red, shaped like a character used in printing, and it was this:

☛

A moment I looked, and then, impressed by a feature of the sign, I walked over and touched the edge of the character. It rubbed away easily, and I thought I knew what it was made with.

"A fresh chalk-mark!" I commented, smiling faintly.

There was no reply, and, beset with sudden uneasiness, I turned. Borrowdale was still staring, and his expression alarmed me. It was not the look I was accustomed to seeing on his firm features, and it gave me a new worry. The dagger and the warning note were on my mind, and it added fresh fuel that the man most concerned should be so upset.

I was hesitating whether to say anything, when Borrowdale came out of his abstraction and moved quickly. With his eyes cast down he walked the floor from side to side and end to end, and always looking for I knew not what. Then he subjected the walls to the same scrutiny, and all the while he said nothing.

My nerves were not in the habit of troubling me, but they twanged now unpleasantly. For good reasons the threat against Miami Borrowdale had upset me, and now I had to look on while her father stalked about with so gloomy a he dagger and the sign in red nd to tranquilize me.

my friend went into the as- study, where he continued

m has been molested, too," he one talking to himself. "It eft in the same confusion as but I am sure things have moved. It is not easy to say positively, where there is so much that litters the way rather erratically, anyhow, but the disturbance is next to certain. I wonder——"

He moved to the edge of the carpet and lifted it clear at that point.

"The tacks have been removed!" he declared, resuming his absent-minded comments. "It has been torn up and——"

He paused, looked about him, and then walked to the window and flung up the sash. The pure air crept in, and I think we both welcomed it. Borrowdale stood with his face toward the forest, but I doubt that he saw anything there.

I did not know what to say or do. Borrowdale was master there, and the trouble was his, not mine. Certainly, it was not for me to force words upon him then, but for him to take the lead and show me what was wanted. Besides, he was twenty years my elder.

At last he turned back to me, and he laughed so naturally that I was surprised. His perturbation seemed to have gone wholly.

"Saywood," he cried heartily, "don't think I am gone daft, but really this matter has exasperated me more than you can guess. My house has been invaded and turned upside down, and it's no trifling matter. Home is sacred, and one doesn't like to have it misused. Of course, we can analyze this intrusion without difficulty. Nothing taken away, so no thieves have been here. It was wanton mischief, done just to annoy me. That's all, so we need not dwell upon it."

I recalled the dagger and the written threat to mind, but it was so evident that Borrowdale was decided upon a certain course that I did not feel like mentioning them then.

"Would it not be well to look outside for footprints and other signs?" I asked.

"Exactly what we will do. Come along!"

"We must take care not to obliterate any marks that will be of value to the officer you summon."

"Ye-s," he agreed hesitatingly.

We went, but neither of us was a trailer by experience, and we found nothing. The hard-beaten paths where inmates of the house walked every day were barren soil for investigation, and it baffled us.

We met the ladies of the family at the late breakfast. The elder, Mrs. Ellett, was well along in years, though mentally bright and physically active, and a delightful example of what old age may do if accompanied by proper personal traits. Miami—how am I to describe Borrowdale's daughter? It would be useless to try, for words sometimes fail to picture charms of speech, expression, manner, and movements. I will leave her where she belongs, in her family circle. What I thought of her may be seen later.

The ladies wanted to talk about the strangers who had violated the Borrowdale privacy and indulged in idle, frivolous, boyish tricks—that was the way they looked at the affair, at that moment, and the master of the house encouraged their views. But it was noticeable that he said nothing about the dagger, the threatening note, and the sign in red.

"This matter," said Mrs. Ellett, as the subject began to wane, "is one for which the whipping-post is the only suitable punishment."

"Better have the post set directly after breakfast, father," suggested Miami, smiling lightly. "We have whips."

"Remember," urged the elder lady, "that we cannot take the law into our own hands."

"Do you think vicious persons the only privileged ones?"

"That is the present drift of the world."

"I maintain that we should have a few privileges ourselves," insisted Miami, nodding sagely. "What detective will you get, father?"

"Detective?" repeated Borrowdale, inquiringly.

"Well, if not that, what constable, officer, or what you please?"

"Oh!" he replied. "There will be no officer."

"What?"

"We have suffered from somebody's prank," Borrowdale explained, "though whether it was a party of men with an ungrounded hatred for society in general or only mischievous boys, we cannot know. Be that as it may, it is over with and we need give it no further thought. Answering you more explicitly, I shall call in no officer!"

The ladies exclaimed in unison, but words had left me. Staring at the speaker, I saw him with downcast head, his eyes apparently fixed upon the fruit he was slowly eating. It was hard for me to believe the evidence of the minute, for his worry in the old wing had been beyond misinterpretation.

"But, why, why?" demanded Miami.

"Because there would be a long chase which would probably come to nothing, and even if an officer learned who did it, why punish so small a misdemeanor?"

"Is housebreaking nothing?" asked Mrs. Ellett, briefly.

"Nothing was stolen, aunt."

But," protested Miami, "we are at their mercy, and they have a chance to come again. Are we to let them do it?"

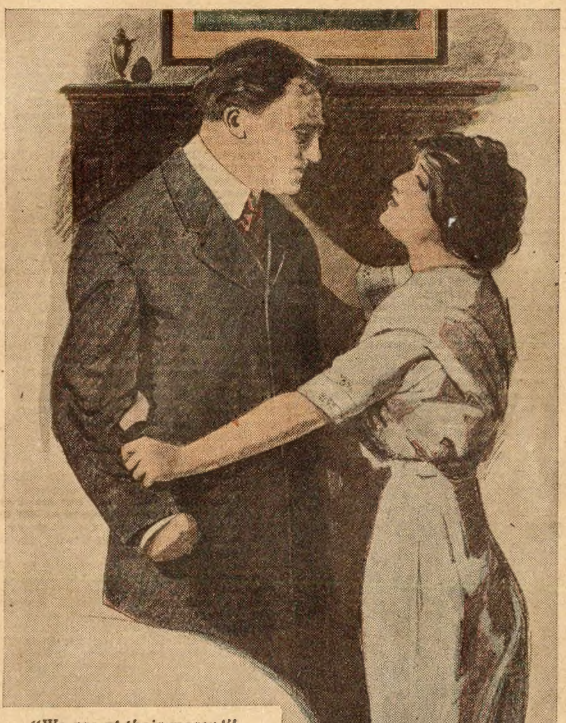
"Oh! well, my dear, since you feel so strongly over it, I will give the question further consideration. Certainly we are not going to have a second intrusion. Rely upon me!"

He said it with a degree of heartiness, but the man who had always been so frank still held his gaze lowered. We could not meet his eyes.

"Besides, you are going away—you and Mr. Saywood—to that meeting of the zinc company in Pennsylvania," reminded Mrs. Ellett.

"When I go I'll leave matters here so that no human being can intrude again. All will be well."

We left the table with this situation unaltered, but with nobody satisfied unless it was Borrowdale. I was the most dissatisfied of all, for I knew of the strange things found in the old part of the house, and no use of common sense could drive away the impression that the case was one for decisive action.



"We are at their mercy!"

I was sure that the raid upon the house had been one of hostility, and that the threat of the knives meant just what it claimed to mean. Danger menaced the members of the family, and if the note was to be believed, death went coupled with it.

As the ladies started away, Borrowdale said he had letters to write and asked me to excuse him briefly, so I lit a cigar and went out for another walk. That cigar accomplished its usual mission—it cleared away all mental fog and left me master of a theory not easily shaken.

The Borrowdales had enemies, and these enemies wanted something of importance to them. To get it they had come and ransacked the premises, though whether successfully I could not tell. Whether they had succeeded or not, they were not yet content—they had left a threat, and fully intended to carry it out, with Miami as the first victim.

In this way matters shaped themselves in my mind, and a chill fell upon my nerves and spirit. Death, never pleasant, was horrible when the girl was menaced.

I was still walking when I came upon Ober, the keeper of the grounds, a reliable and intelligent man I had known for a year or two. He was standing with his attention directed to an object he held, but he aroused as I appeared and seemed glad to see me.

"I've found something odd on the ground here, Mr. Saywood," he began. "I'd like your opinion of it, sir."

He extended what was to justify his statement. It surely was something odd.

CHAPTER III.

FOUND IN THE DOOR.

I TOOK the gardener's find and examined it wonderingly. It was a piece of rope curiously knotted, with loops turned at sharp angles, and, where knots had not sufficed, it was held in place here and there by minute strings. At any other time I should have regarded such a complicated arrangement, which seemed to form only a bunch, as a child's idle effort, but no such idea was in my mind then.

"What, sir," Ober pursued, "do you know about the sea?"

"Nothing," I answered. "I have never been on large bodies of water except for ferry-trips on their edge now and then."

"In that case you couldn't say whether those are sailor's knots?"

"No, I can't say——"

"I think they are, Mr. Saywood, and I know there was a strange man, a sailor, near here last evening, and he had a talk with a woman from our house—leastways, I think she was one of our people, though I did not come near enough to recognize her."

"What's that?" I asked quickly. "A strange man near here?"

"Yes, sir. I was crossing the grounds about half an hour after dark, and I saw them standing right here, together. The man I saw the plainer, and he had sailor's clothes on. The maid was in deeper shadow as they talked, and I can tell nothing about her surely. Still, she must, I should say, have come from our house."

"Have you heard, Ober, that the premises were burglariously entered last night?"

"Who, no, sir! I have been to town to buy things, and only just got back. I've not seen any of the family or the servants. Burglars? Now, I wonder if it was that sailor?"

"Consider the manner of the two persons who talked here," I directed. "May it not be that they came together, rather than that one of our women met the sailor?"

"I should say it was a meeting," Ober persisted. "Their manner was like it, anyhow. I can't help feeling, sir, that the knot you have there is a sailor's knot."

This turned my attention back to the oddly-shaped rope, and as I shifted my gaze and held the object higher, I placed it in a position it had not before occupied before my eyes. Instantly a discovery followed. Knotted as the rope was, it formed a shape well known in other lines, and this was what it was like:

☛

I had been depressed, but now a fresh chill fell upon me, and the clutch of it was painful. No idle employment had led to that knotting, for it was surely intended for a "hand," being remarkably like the character used in printing. Worse yet, it was a good imitation of the hand marked in red on Borrowdale's wall.

For a few seconds I stood as if petrified. The vendetta against my host was marching onward relentlessly, like a missile of destruction that was not to be checked. It was almost as if I could see the enemy closing in, fastening upon the vitals of the family and mocking them, with death stalking in the van of the hostile party. For I fully believed now in the terrible purpose of the unknown men.

Ober began speaking again, but it occurred to me that with this new evidence I ought to see the master of the house at once and try to arouse him to practical action. Retaining the knotted rope, I asked the gardener to accompany me, and turned back toward the house. I was just in time to see Borrowdale come out on the piazza, and when I had his attention I beckoned and he came.

Leading him somewhat aside I told the story as it presented itself to me. Ober had seen a person in conversation with a woman believed to be one of our household, and the interview had been secret.

"Moreover," I added, "Ober says that strange man was dressed as a sailor, and here is something found on the ground where they stood."

With this I held up the rope so its true shape would be apparent at first sight.

I had long known that Borrowdale was of steel-like firmness when fully keyed up to confront an emergency, but it was a surprise now when I marked his expression. For a moment an odd light glinted in his eyes almost as if they danced or wavered, yet I did not see that they shifted an atom. I did see his lips close tightly, a sign of his iron will.

He took the rope hand from me and examined it carefully for a brief time, and his fingers were without a quiver. Then he looked at Ober.

"Dressed like a sailor, you say?" he asked quietly.

"Yes, sir," the gardener replied.

"We have never had a seafaring man here, and for good reason. The ocean is far away. Do you, Ober, know of anybody in town who has a kinsman or friend who sails the sea?"

"No, sir, none."

"Then we may, perhaps, accept the sailor as part of the raid upon us. That is, a man from a distance. But the woman. If you saw here, why did you fail to recognize her?"

"I was not near enough, sir. The dress of the man was plain from where I stood, but how she was dressed I don't know I did not see any reason then—more's the pity, sir—why I should try to see who she was. She was slight, and I suppose that means she was young."

"Besides my daughter we have two slight young women in Esther Tieman and Delia Lorwell. I'll question them. Now, let's take up the matter of footprints here at once. Something may come of it."

We carried out his plan, and found tracks very much like those discovered in the dust in the house. While not rash enough to make decided claims based upon our slight knowledge in that way, the evidence convinced us.

"Granted that the woman in the case was one of our number, it seems she was an ally of the burglars. I'll look into this!"

I rejoiced to hear him speak, and to see the set of his jaw. The indecision of early morning was gone, the usual Borrowdale was back, and he was ready to make a fight of it. I applauded, but rested content to let him lead. He was much my elder, and there were reasons why I did not want to offend Miami's father.

I was not present when he questioned the servant maids, but he confessed that he made no advance there. Both Esther and Delia insisted that they had not been out of the house the previous evening, and that they had neither met a man then nor knew any sailor.

As nobody was inclined to consider Miami in connection with the meeting, she was not questioned.

"Now," said Borrowdale, with decision, "we will take strong measures to defeat the next blow, if one is intended. Work is dull at this season on my farm, and it shall end wholly. My men, as a rule, shall sleep by day and watch the house by night. Pierson, my butler, shall have charge of them, and you and I, Saywood, will patrol the grounds all night. How does that impress you?"

It impressed me so favorably that I wrung his hand fervently in addition to saying something commendatory. Really, I was delighted. The talk about a joke and that sort of rubbish was dropped, and Borrowdale was himself, alert, active, and aggressive. That pleased me.

Night fell after a quiet day. Ober, sent to the town to use his eyes and ears—but not his tongue—reported that he could find no strangers there, suspicious or otherwise.

"That proves that our enemies are hiding," said Borrowdale. "The only way to catch them is to lie in wait, and that's what we'll do. They will soon come."

His decision settled it, though I still

(Continued on page twenty-one.)

Doris Lyndahl's Flight

Or, The Girl-Wife's Test

By Mason Ray

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CHAPTER III.

WHEN the waxlike arbutus peeped above the brown leaf-mold, Doris held a pale, delicate babe in her arms. Dr. Harwell, ponderous, optimistic, kindly, allowed the young mother to descend to the livingroom after what seemed an eternity. Then, day by day, Doris sat by the babe's crib and watched the futile waving pink palms, the small face with its promise of Gordon's features; she touched the soft flesh with a mother's rapture and planned for the child's future. Gordon commenced the unwonted habit of reading aloud from his wife's favorite authors, and watched the babe's slight growth with interest. And neither of the two took note of the unspoken apprehension in the faces of the physician and Madam Lyndahl.

"Yo' jes' mark my words," Martha confided to her assistant, "dat li'l blossom'll go with the las' spring flowers."

Anxious days and nights followed, during which the elder matron assumed entire charge. With desperate vigilance she battled for the ebbing life. The flower month waned; June starred the forest with snow-white trillium; then the flowers faded and the spark of life went out.

For days after, Doris lay in a stupor of grief, but Madam Lyndahl seemed like a lioness deprived of its young. She bitterly regretted her—so she thought—lax management of the young mother. Down in her heart of hearts she believed the young wife responsible. This sentiment, terrible in import, was by chance made known to the one accused. Doris had, ghostlike, flitted down to the sittingroom at a time when she was supposed to be still sleeping. Dr. Harwell was standing in the diningroom consulting with Gordon's mother, his broad back to the arch, and the lady herself was entirely concealed.

"She ca. blame no one but herself," Doris heard Madam Lyndahl's voice assert, while the Doctor waved a silencing hand. "The child had no chance, ever. He was doomed before birth. The mother's sedentary habits deprived him of vitality. I tell you the babe was sacrificed to selfish pleasure."

"Nonsense!" cried the Doctor when he could be heard. "Nothi.. could have saved the infant. You must not blame the mother."

"But I do," the older woman reasserted with bitterness. "I consider that the babe was prenatally murdered."

"Hush!" sternly ordered the physician, but he was too late. Doris had inadvertently heard, understood, and sank by the fireplace in an unconscious heap.

Weeks elapsed before she recovered from the second illness. July flooded the earth with sunshine, the trees luxuriated in fullest foliage when the invalid again crept down to the livingrooms, and neither Madam Lyndahl nor the Doctor ever knew with positiveness that the girl swooned because of what came to her ears that fateful morning. Gordon again tarried near to read aloud, or ordered up the carriage and wh'sked the pale, dull-eyed patient off for increasingly long drives.

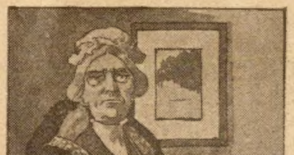
On one of these occasions they rode for miles silently enjoying the landscape. The highway wound by green fields studded with yellow dandelions that seemed intense jewels in an emerald robe, past banks of drooping fern, around bends of the lake where cedars cast their perfect image on the still water. Finally they drove across the clear brook that flowed through their own park to pour its crystal liquid down the high bank to the lake.

"It all seems like visions of Heaven," Doris murmured. "Gordon, I don't wonder that Burns sang of his country's lakes and streams."

When the young wife removed her hat and gloves in the hall, Jud passed the door and handed her a packet and letter. The first contained the advance sheets of a new book with rural setting, and the letter requested Doris to supply ten illustrations. Opportunity was knocking at her door, and the artist, craving work that would deaden heart-hunger, plunged into the preparatory reading. The pleasant and absorbing occupation came none too soon. Gordon, never a ladies' man, soon tired of the confinement of the house and the monotony of the drives. Consequently he resumed his long tramps, his outdoor life with gun and reel, and scrambles through miles of brush with a camp dinner over a twig fire at the noon hour.

As days passed, Doris spent more and more of her time before her easel in woods and field, sketching backgrounds for the imaginary characters she imbued with seeming vitality. When not out of doors she worked at her desk. This isolation was no longer because of a desire to keep her employment concealed. Rather she lived apart because of an instinctive shrinking from the presence of Madam Lyndahl. True, she but dimly recalled the elder woman's harsh accusation regarding the death of her child, but the incident had its effect, with other remembrances, in driving her to seek solitude.

Madam Lyndahl's annoyance at the girl's reserved habits deepened. This irresponsible mode of time-spending seemed, to her thrifty mind, almost criminal. At the first opportunity she determined to inspect Doris's retreat and discover, if possible, the hidden attraction. When next Doris departed with her easel and sketching materials, the mystified woman tried the locked door with various keys until one turned. Another difficulty arose. The lid of the desk was likewise securely fastened. The fact was eloquent. Since Gordon utterly lacked the first element of curiosity, the searcher knew that she, herself, was the one guarded against, and the thought angered her. Every key on her housekeeping bunch was applied, then others from her room, until one was found that exactly fitted. When the lid lifted she saw a half-dozen sketches, and beneath them the advance print of the new book containing marked passages. These were the selected scenes portrayed in the half-dozen pictures, but the fact was lost on the present reader. Seeing no significance in the pages, she cast all this aside. Letters had been destroyed, but beneath partly finished sketches she found two items that held her attention. The first was an envelope addressed to Jud Kilbeam, and the other one of Heath Merrill's cards with his penciled address.



The letter.

Instantly half-understood scenes and acts of the past ranged themselves into a coherent whole.

"Doris is false to Gordon," she thought. "The silly fool is carrying on a clandestine correspondence."

The idea maddened her, but she dared not mention her suspicion to Gordon without proof, convincing proof. With painstaking exactness she replaced book and sketches, locked the desk and the door, then resumed her knitting by the sittingroom windows. During the long afternoon she pondered the question. One by one she recalled incidents, seemingly innocent at the time, that took on a new meaning. She resolved to wait—and watch. Had Doris confided her ambition to Gordon, even though he crushed it, she might have been saved. But the young wife's cowardice, the husband's intolerance of fame-aspiring women, the elder woman's aggressive measures for control, all lead to the disastrous end.

A year slipped by, bringing a happy month or two in the city with Gordon, and a renewal of acquaintance with Dick and Merrill. The latter quietly gave the artist valuable hints about her work, and trusted her with illustrating another book. This commission gave life a zest after her return, and sent her about the house and grounds with light feet and happy countenance. The work was finished and dispatched during late autumn, and then came sifting snowflakes and the holidays.

"I'd jes' like to know," Martha demanded, snapping shut the oven door with a bang, "what all there is to be thankful 'bout."

"Having lots to eat," suggested Lucy, waving a dish-towel toward a table covered with edibles intended for the Thanksgiving feast.

"If dat's all," complained the cook, "lan' knows we-all eat 'nough. Seem's like we eats ebery bressed minute dat we ain't cooking or fas' sleep. We might's well be wil' Injuns—or b'ars." Martha had never been reconciled to the sudden flitting of the Lyndahl's from a well-appointed city residence to the country.

"Anyway, Mis' Doris has found something to be glad about," said Lucy, as she glanced from the window and saw the young wife smiling over a letter handed to her by Jud. That individual with the veterinary title had taken care to abstract his supposed share of the evening mail from the sack before delivering the remainder. Having executed his mission he shoved his cap to the back of his head, seized the ever-waiting ax, and resumed wood-splitting for the ever-waiting cook. The recipient of the missive entered the house and continued on up the stairs to her room.

When alone, Doris, with eyes sparkling, drew from the envelope an oblong slip with perforations that formed a substantial figure. This check marked an important milestone in her artistic career. It spelled success. With the universal human longing for sympathy, she wished she might confide this pleasure to Gordon; but a mental vision of his undoubted anger at her occupation deterred her. She was again a victim of moral cowardice. Not daring to exhibit her little fortune, she looked about for a spot safe from possible thieves. If lost, it would be inconvenient, if not impossible, to secure a duplicate. She considered the space beneath the loosened marble slab of the dressing stand, but rejected the idea. Finally she returned it to the envelope and slipped it under the carpet. Step by step Doris was descending to the lower strata of deception.

When the small family gathered about the table, Madam Lyndahl noted the girl's radiant face. This light-heartedness, coupled with the mail delivery she had witnessed from a side window, while Lucy gazed from the window above her dish sink, aroused her never-sleeping suspicions. Therefore, as Gordon and his wife departed for an evening drive to the village, she determined upon a second bit of detective enterprise. By the aid of the keys used on a former occasion, she entered Doris's room and diligently examined every part of it, including the furnishings. Even the under side of the mattress on the white-covered bed received thoughtful inspection, but, owing to the young artist's precaution, nothing new rewarded her diligence. Failing in her search, she summoned Jud to her presence.

"After this," she ordered, "you will bring the mail sack direct to me. I'll personally attend to the sorting. You're to pass over all the mail. Do you understand?"

"Yes, 'um," Jud assured her, "there'll be yourn an' Mr. Lyndahl's an' Lucy's an' Martha's an' Miss Doris's, an'—mine."

The emphasis was unfortunate. It had the effect of shaking Madam Lyndahl's faith in this method. It set her wits to contriving an improvement. She concluded to write a note to Mrs. Webb and notify her to make a record of every piece of mail directed to Lyndahl Terrace. If the distance had permitted, she would have visited the office each evening in person; but a request from her to the flattered postmistress was equal to a command. The scheme would inform her whether Jud held back any part of the list. At the wood-pile Jud split endless slabs and ruminated.

"Yes, 'um," he aspirated, in an accompaniment to forceful strokes, "I'll hand you all the mail wh back; but what I leaves insi holler log won't be nobody It'll be addressed to Jud Kil young lady what I know's mo to go that way later an' g seein' as I'm s'posed to have just send to one o' them le mail fellers an' have him teac sure 'nough hoss doctorin'. Th might like to look 'em over."

Some time later the lists readily by the postmistress agree with the actual letters a received. Jud knew nothing of sheet, else he'd have rectified Mr figures to suit his fancy. As Madam Lyndahl's suspicions be tainty. She now pondered on means to secure the constantl pieces. This necessitated a tri postoffice. Therefore she ord carriage around to the door, an sibly started out for a round calls. Doris was not invited to pany her, and Jud, who acted capacity of coachman, shrewdly g her errand.

They stopped, exactly as he g they would, at "Traveler's Rest," small hotel kept by Mrs. Webb in junction with a postoffice. Jennie eldest of the widow's children, op the door to admit their distingui caller, while Jake, the long-limbed awkward chore boy, loitered by the riage and "chinned" with Jud.

"I ain't never what you might well," stated the robust landlady, as conducted her guest into the parlor seated her, "but business is good's usu Between four steady store clerks, t teacher, and men what's hauling logs, manage somehow.. What the postoffic fetches just about buys clothes; so ther it is."

Her last remark brought to the corpulent lady's mind an irritating question.

"I've listed your mail nights just as you asked me. There's a purty lot, too And Jud, he gets the most stuff I eve see—packages and letters till you can't rest. I don't know what to make of it Jud, you know, was a gutter rat. He's one o' them city vermints what tramped out here and stayed. Now his getting so much mail when he never got any before looks queer."

"How long has he been receiving letters?" Madam Lyndahl asked. The woman had launched the very subject she came to discuss.

"Why, ever since"—the postmistress paused to decide—"ever since about the time them Chicago people was over to your place. That's when."

Madam Lyndahl lowered her eyes that the eager interest in them might not be revealed. Beyond doubt she now knew the meaning of the envelope she had discovered in Doris's desk addressed to Jud Kilbeam. The former gutter-snipe was an accomplice in the employ of Heath Merrill. And Doris, the infatuated fool, was carrying on a clandestine correspondence with the publisher.

Having accomplished the first part of her mission, the self-appointed detective perfected a new arrangement.

"You already know I've been anxious to have our letters safely delivered. Many of them are exceedingly valuable." (This was nearer the truth than she guessed.) "If this Jud Kilbeam is the sort of man you seem to think, perhaps we had best not trust him with important mail. Perhaps you had better send it out by special messenger when you notice many letters. Pay your errand boy from this." She handed the astonished Mrs. Webb a yellow-backed bill that was eloquent. "Send the boy by a roundabout way, and, to satisfy Jud, hand over to him the evening papers."

Mrs. Webb gladly consented. She understood far more of what her caller wished than appeared on the surface. For reasons she could only surmise, Madam Lyndahl of Lyndahl Terrace wished to scan the letters and packages sent to the red-headed guide. If so she would see that opportunity was not lacking. She was loath neither to ingratiate herself with rich city neighbors nor to revenge herself on Jud for his evident appraisement of her own character.

Nothing came of this bargain until Gordon Lyndahl was summoned to the last threshing out of the Lyndahl real estate matter in the courts.

"I'll probably," he encouraged his mother, "pull several quite plump chestnuts out of this last fire. It may detain me several weeks, but the end will put us on Easy street."

Doris placed her book on the table and slowly gathered courage to make a request that had obsessed her mind for days. Winter was raging without. A white smother was being blown into drifts by bleak winds. She longed to escape from the close confinement of Lyndahl Terrace during the inclement season. She longed to accompany her husband to the city. His companionship and city life would mean Heaven. Madam Lyndahl and the present shut-in existence seemed to her an unbearable prospect. Swallowing her fear of refusal she spoke.

"Gordon, take me with you," she pleaded.

There ensued a dead silence. The three

a flaming log fire and each its glowing heart.

be alone," Gordon said at last, ideration. "I'll be extremely ides it's madness for you to blizzard. You're better off here

heavy heart Doris arose and er room. The request had been nd disappointment dimmed her ater, when the two were alone, sumed her pleading.

on," she said, with a voice trem- I don't mind the blizzard; better that than to face solitude. We so much that we seem to grow —" in each other. Gordon, I can't

ense, Doris!" returned her hus- arply. He turned away irritably er clinging hands and inviting lips. red of your fretting. You have and the servants to look after It's utter folly to risk the journey r the circumstances."

ris understood. She was aware who drilled him in what was advisable. there came the hope of another to the Lyndahl home. She knew further supplication was worse than less. She saw that her happiness must ing from her own effort, from absorb- occupation.

Lyndahl neither lacked affection nor liberately neglected slight attentions essential to the happiness of women. stead, he was simply phlegmatic. Sen- mental endearments had never formed art of his home training. But time was o show this self-contained, matter-of-act stoic that there were stranger emo- ions in life's philosophy than he dreamed.

March blustered out its venom and ushered in a blaze of sunlight. Meanwhile the vague antagonism existing between the two women steadily increased. An icy wall of polite reserve divided them as far as from pole to pole. Madam Lyndahl was exasperated at the young woman's insubordination. The girl was like a feeble, tiny brook that resistlessly forced its way about a huge, intercepting bowlder. Distaste for Madam's society drove her more and more to the seclusion of her own room, even though its temperature was uncomfortably chilly. This angered the elder matron to the point of what nearly approached a scene. Chafing one day that the girl evaded the sewingroom and chose solitude and a book, she knocked peremptorily at the door and ordered her to descend to the rooms below. Firmly but courteously Doris declined.

"You're locking yourself up is absurd," cried the angry mentor. "You must cease it. I'll call in Dr. Harwell. You sha'n't destroy life a second time. Do you hear?"

With a spring Doris had unlocked and flung wide the intervening door. Then, with a face like marble, eyes blazing and form rigid, she stood confronting the accuser. The next moment she gained control of her passion and calmly responded.

"I'm sorry that you consider my presence necessary to—your peace of mind. As my own is best conserved—during this period—by absolute freedom of occupation and thought, I'll ask your consideration."

Then, as if automatically operated, the door shut, the key turned, and Doris was alone.

The incident redoubled the arbitrary matron's desire to lay hold of the long-delayed proof of Doris's treachery. When that occurred she would have the headstrong girl completely in her power. She would compel obedience through Doris's natural cowardice, through the fear of losing Gordon's regard. She would, in short, play this game to a finish. Then suddenly fate played into the enraged matron's itching palms.

Mrs. Webb, that very evening, noted an unusual amount of mail directed to Jud. "This," thought she, " is the very time. I'll send Jake flying before Jud gets here. Then I'll tell him he's too late. Tell him I didn't think he was coming." Accordingly the long-limbed youth raced to Lyndahl Terrace, and accordingly Madam Lyndahl discovered exactly what she desired.

"Is there a letter from Gordon?" asked Doris, when she later descended from an hour spent before her easel. Her heart filled with sharp apprehension as she noted the strange expression of the elder woman's countenance. Silently Madam Lyndahl handed her a missive from the absent member of the family, addressed, as usual, to both mother and wife. This was Gordon's time-saving device. What he accomplished naturally concerned both, and he saw no reason for writing separate accounts. After mastering its brief contents, Doris waited. On the mantel an ebony clock ticked off an eternity. About her were the commonplace comforts of home; the clear lights, roaring grate-fire, the russet-colored plush of couch, chairs, and rug; the supper table beyond the arch with its white cloth, sparkling glass and silver.

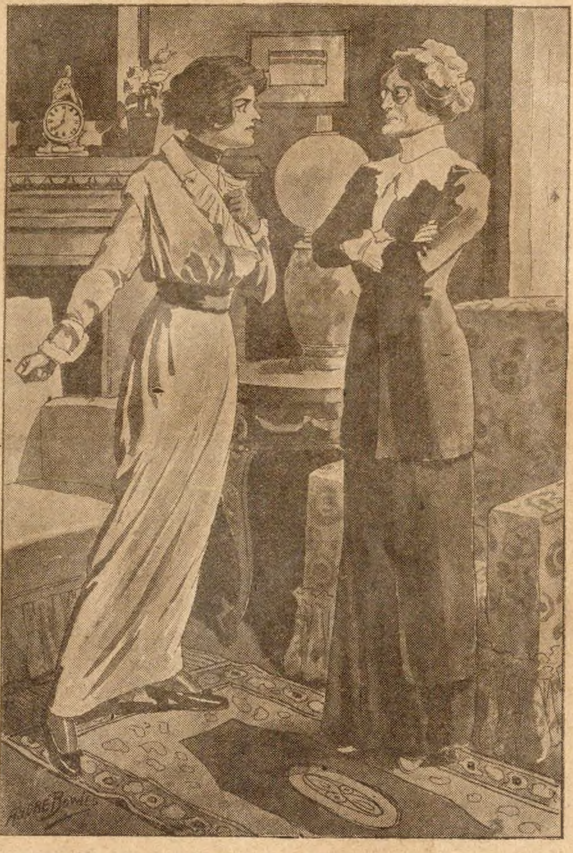
Presently Madam Lyndahl commenced to read aloud the one letter she had opened. Her voice was low with suppressed rage, like the calm that precedes a storm. The staccato words that came to Doris's startled ears were the most fiendish combination that art, or innocence, could have devised.

"My Dear Mrs. Lyndahl," she read. "Enclosed you will find a delayed check. Later I will write you all that haste forbids. I want to tell you more about what it has meant to have discovered you hidden among the pines. You have, indeed, interpreted their spirit—the soul of nature. Until you again hear from me,

"Yours truly,

"HEATH MERRILL."

"I have known for some time," commented Madam Lyndahl, in low tones of concentrated wrath, "that you 'had been discovered,' as your lover puts it. I knew he had abused our hospitality and turned your silly head. But I never dreamed you had progressed in the affair to the shameful point of receiving money. Beyond the disgraceful understanding you perfected with your husband's hired man——'



"You shall not insult me with the name."

"Silence! Hear what I have to say before you open lying lips," she commanded, as Doris sprang to her feet with a cry of denial. "For the flattery of this smooth stranger you have perjured yourself and others. You have employed Jud Kilbeam, the former gutter-snipe, to act as go-between. You have sulked in seclusion and idled your time. You have given to a scoundrel the love——"

"Stop!" cried Doris. "You shall not insult me with the name."

"I saw you come from his room!" cried Madam Lyndahl at white heat of anger.

"Very well, what of it?" demanded Doris, stung to fury.

"This," declared the elder woman. "Your husband will believe you're all that's vile—an adulteress, a perjurer, an idle fool."

"What then?" insisted Doris, frenzied with horror.

"This!" cried Madam, shrilly "He'll send you forth like Hagar—you and your child. You know he's slow to believe and never forgives. He'll cast you out of his life and home."

Unable to endure more, Doris staggered from the room and up the familiar oak stairway to her sheltering haven. Her brain was dulled by horror. In her heart she believed the statements of Gordon's mother. Neither he nor the one who charged her with guilt would believe in her innocence. Too late she perceived the network of deceit she had woven about her. Even when Merrill ultimately made plain the real facts, she would still be an unpardoned culprit. Gordon hated a woman who sold her talents, who served the public. He would cast her out in either case.

With hands pressed to her throbbing head she considered the awful thing that had come to her in that hour. Like a child mastering a difficult lesson she pondered concerning her future. She weighed each item in the balance. After a time there crept into her large brown eyes a look of cunning. Her condition of mind was abnormal. Her reasoning became distorted. With almost animal instinct she resolved to escape, to hide herself away from uncongenial surroundings and from those she had angered. All other emotions became subordinate to this idea. With infinite nicety of detail she perfected a plan that would remove her beyond reach. But to accomplish this she must have cash. She wondered what sum was named in the check downstairs. To secure it was impossible. Instead she would stop payment on that draft and request currency in its place. She would state that it was lost, which was true as far as she was concerned. With her letter she would enclose other unnegotiated checks and have them cashed. Just how she should manage to dispatch the letter and receive the currency she could not tell. Jud would see to that. Meanwhile she must go about the house as usual. Instinct again told her that Madam Lyndahl would make no present move. The unfortunate check and accompanying letter would be figuratively held over her head as a club to drive her to submission.

Consequently Madam Lyndahl, who inwardly feared that she had overdone the part, was astonished to see Doris reenter the livingroom and quietly take her accustomed place at the table. The girl ate heartily, but in her manner there lurked an indefinable something the elder woman failed to analyze. It was neither resentment nor contrition, neither fear nor anger.

"Seems like," declared Lucy, after serving the meal, "just 'sif there's a funeral in the house. Old Mis' looks mad an' Mis' Doris she has the face o' a dead woman."

"Then," cried Jud, while light broke on his troubled brain, "there was mail for our folks tonight. When I ast Mis' Webb she said there wan't none."

"What's the mail got to do with it," demanded Lucy.

"Everything!" groaned Jud.

He blamed himself for the catastrophe that evidently had taken place. When presently his legitimate horse-doctoring pamphlets were handed to him, his quick eyes noted that they had been examined. He grinned. Then he frowned.

"Meddling with people's mail stuff is ag'in' the law, old lady," he apostrophized, when by himself. "If I should go an' git my dander up, somebody'd have to pay a fine."

That evening Lucy missed Jud's gay retort and uncouth courtship. Dismally she washed the supper dishes alone, while Jud vigorously punished the wood-pile. This was his outlet for internal disturbance. Doris, with a volume of Dickens before her, sat by the reading table. Her face was the hue of marble. Her eyes saw not the printed page, but only the grim knitter by the glowing wood fire. Again the artist imagined the scene of the Commune at the foot of La Guillotine. Again the features were identical with the face at the fireside.

Just before break of day Jud examined the snow beneath Doris's window and found what he expected. He reasoned that the young wife would wish to write and explain, perhaps, the evening's happening. His wit told him that this would be prevented by her self-appointed guard. Observation made certain that Doris's window was being watched, and her one chance to drop a letter would be long after midnight. He found it folded in an extra bit of paper, and penciled on the wrapper were the directions:

"Please post, and in about five days bring the answer."

That was all. She had ventured everything in a last attempt, and trusted him to guard the answer. Placing the letter in his pocket he swore to succeed, not only in landing the expected missive, but with the one in hand. Consequently, he saddled Gordon's best mount and sped through the twilight of dawn to the railway station itself. There he slipped the square of white into the slit of an office mail box and turned homeward.

"Now, Mistress Webb," he mused, "that there's two cents lost, besides a chance to interfere in other folks' business."

When he stalled the horse in the Lyndahl stable, the sun swung well above the highest treetops. And when he entered the kitchen in quest of the milk pail, the indignant cook charged him with late rising. Before the local stage time, Madam Lyndahl handed him the outgoing letters. Among them was one addressed to the absent son.

"Get this in before it's too late," she sharply commanded. "Mrs. Webb will report on all pieces both coming and going." She regarded him a moment with hostile meaning. Then added a curt, "Now go."

During the days of waiting, Doris moved about like one in a trance. Shadowed in her dark eyes was the expression of a hunted animal. She had no doubt that a letter had gone to Gordon recounting the story of her misdeeds. Racing against its influence was her own demand for currency, the means that would assist her to flee from his inevitable wrath. She waited in breathless suspense to learn which would be first at the goal; but she did not know that her own sped cityward by an earlier train, while the second was handicapped in its progress by being painstakingly registered. Jud had not only fulfilled instructions, but had elaborated with a few flourishes of his own invention.

Each night at mail time he haunted the postoffice. Each night as Mrs. Webb sorted the contents of the mail sack she scanned the pieces for Jud's name, which she was again ordered to send by special messenger. The sixth night there appeared one carefully wrapped package bearing the suspicious name. To divert mail when the apparent owner stood waiting was both difficult and dangerous. However, her wealthy patron's request was not to be ignored. She hated Jud and longed to ingratiate herself with the powers above him. Leaving her daughter, Jennie, in charge of the office she dispatched Jake with the package and was back at her post in a trice.

Jud, leaning against the counter, noted her temporary disappearance with thoughtful surprise. Still ruminating, he watched her proceed slowly with distribution of papers and letters. Finally it dawned on his razor intellect that the lady was "soaking time." With an abruptness that nearly shattered the door he flung himself out and off toward home. On he dashed, as if pursued by wild Indians. The distance was half covered when he glimpsed a swaying, flying form with its arms waving. The sight lent wings to Jud's quite sizable feet. A long swinging lope put him beside the lank messenger. He gripped the youth's frayed collar, then silently wrenched from his hold the coveted parcel.

"Hi, Jake," he gasped, when this was accomplished, "there hain't no need for you to tote my mail! Don't you go botherin' yourself no more, or I'll send the sheriff 'round to reason with you. Hear that?"

"Mis' Webb told me," commenced Jake, with paling visage.

"Never mind what she told you. I'm the one orating; an' I say turn about and foller your nose. That is, before I break it," corrected Jud.

"I didn't mean no——"

(Continued on page twenty-one.)

The Palace of Doom

Or, The Passion of an Empress By Hugh Hamilton

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CHAPTER IX.

HOW THE WORM TURNED.

AS THE days wore on, the Countess Xenia chafed under the espionage of the Princess Dragonoff. She avoided her unwelcome guest as much as possible. They had nothing in common, these two women so widely dissimilar, the one under the Empress's ban, the other that designing woman's tool.

Xenia heard nothing from the outside world. What had become of Ivan Panine she did not know. Had he been consigned to some dungeon from which he would be sent to a living death in the horrible mines from which he had escaped? Or had a cord taken his life in secret and his body been consigned to the icy waters of the relentless Neva? And what had become of Paul?

She dared not ask the Princess. Therefore the hours were long for the beautiful Countess in the Palace of Doom, and she went from room to room like a restless spirit, trying to beat back the feelings that struggled for utterance.

At length she resolved to hear from the outer world. She would know what was happening there. Summoning Magda, her maid, into her presence, she told the girl to slip from the palace and gather tidings if she could. Magda was clear-headed and resourceful, and eagerly undertook her mission.

Meantime the Dragonoff had grown tyrannical. She began to lord it over Xenia's entourage with the spirit of a Medici.

The servants wondered why this woman had come to the palace. What right had she to dominate there? Had she not a palace of her own, and was she not the Empress's favorite, a heartless, cunning creature who loved wine even to intoxication and who was brutal in all her instincts?

It was an hour after Magda's departure that Vera Dragonoff came out of her apartment and stood for a minute under the lamp that swung censer-like from the lofty ceiling. Never for a moment had she discarded the elegant robes which she affected. Jewels blazed on her swelling bosom, and her flushed face told of a long tarrying at the vintage. Casting her eyes up and down the passage, she scowled like a wild animal and then emitted a hoarse laugh.

"I've got the fine bird under my wing," she said to herself. "I know how to manage such a creature. The Empress made no mistake when she sent me to this palace. There will be no escape till the doors open for the ride to Siberia!" And with this she walked away with the mien of a queen.

She had proceeded but a few steps when a side door opened and Xenia appeared. Paul's sweetheart stopped suddenly when her gaze fell upon her jaileress. The two women, who had not met for some time, stood face to face. It was too late for the young Countess to withdraw, and she clinched her hands and waited for the Princess to speak.

"Meseems you avoid me, my dear," said Dragonoff, in cutting tones. "But let me tell you that I am still your guest, willy nilly, and that I shall remain here at the pleasure of the great Empress Catherine."

Under these biting words Xenia flushed to the temples.

"It is true, Princess, that I did not send for you," she answered. "I have the pleasure of telling you that you are the most unwelcome guest that ever crossed the Carloff threshold."

"And you are the most designing woman I ever guarded," was the snapped retort.

The Countess swallowed hard.

"Were it not that you came at the command of the Empress, you should not remain another hour beneath my roof."

"Claws underneath your Tyrian purple, eh?" hissed Dragonoff. "I fancy you sigh for your lover."

"If I do 'tis for a nobler soul than any one who has felt your lips."

"I like you," said Dragonoff, dropping her voice. "I really do, my dear. Life here would be ennui if you did not now and then show your teeth. Do you know how many versts it is to Irkutsk?"

"I leave that for you to determine when the Empress is tired of you," returned Xenia, whose cheeks burned more than ever.

The bolt went home. Vera Dragonoff started forward and Xenia drew dack. The very touch of this titled menial was contamination.

"Don't touch me. You're unclean!" almost shrieked the captive Countess. "I will not be defiled. Is it not enough that I exhaust my wine cellars to supply you with oblivion? Don't touch me, I say," and the fair girl shrank away, pushing her skirts out of reach.

The Dragonoff almost roared in her rage.

"Wait!" she cried. "Some night I shall have the supreme pleasure of wrapping you in traveling robes, and, as I know how to handle the lines, I shall have the satisfaction of escorting you over the first stage of your journey."

Xenia shivered. Was it really true that she was to embark for the snows of Siberia? Would the Empress carry her love and hate thus far? Would she dare to send her out into the pitiless night, perhaps chained to some convict who had committed the darkest crime on the calendar? And then she thought:

"Catherine is merciless. She will dare anything. When love burns in her bosom she will stop at nothing to attain her ends," and then she withdrew, leaving her jaileress impotent in her anger.

The Dragonoff called to her, but she did not stop.

Once back in her private apartments, Xenia went to an escritoire and took hence a gold-hilted dagger, a present from Paul, and concealed it in her bosom.

"That creature shall not remain," she said, through welded lips. "I will not breathe the same air that fans her cheeks. If it is to be war between me and the great Empress, war let it be."

She went to a narrow door, which she opened, and called a name which brought to her a man almost as giantlike as the redoubtable Ursus.

"Feodor," said Xenia, "you have seen my guest?"

"The Princess Dragonoff?"

"The Empress's spy, yes."

"I have seen her."

"I want her away," continued Xenia. "She must go this night—now!"

Feodor seemed to chuckle.

"Don't harm her, Feodor," the Countess continued. "I know you have hands that can crush a stone. Let them be gentle for once, for this woman is, near the great Empress. But rid me of her presence."

The servant bowed and disappeared. Straight to the apartments of the Princess he marched with the tread of a lion. In another moment he stood in the woman's presence, and at sight of him unannounced, the wine glass fell from her hand and spilled its rubiness over her velvet gown.

"I haven't sent for you," cried the Dragonoff, flushing. "I did not ring."

"No, Princess," answered Feodor. "I have come to escort you from the palace.

"From the palace, dog?"

"From my mistress's palace."

The giant advanced with a leer on his face, for the work was most congenial, and put out his great hands.

"I dare you!" almost shrieked the white-faced woman. "I am here at the command of the Empress. I——"

"And I acknowledge first the commands of the Countess Xenia.

The Princess was a vortex of passion. In vain did she clutch the chair from which she had arisen. The hands of Feodor gripped her shoulders, and he lifted her from the floor.

"You shall exchange this palace for Siberia!" cried the maddened woman.

"I could live a thousand years in the mines if I knew that you were no longer here. Come, my dear Princess. The night is cold without, but you are well clad."

"I'll have your life for this indignity!"

Feodor only laughed. He carried the angry Princess from the room, and sprang lightly with his burden down the corridor. Ursus, who was still on guard and unsuspected of his connivance with the futile attempt at escape, saw the door open in his face.

"Help me! Save me!" cried the Dragonoff, at sight of the Cossack giant.

A grim smile overspread the face of Ursus.

"Good night, Princess," said Feodor, as he pushed the truculent woman down the snowy steps.

Her foot caught in her drapery, and, flushed with wine, she sprawled headlong in the fleecy white, and Ursus, who had no love for the favorite whom all St. Petersburg hated, winked at Feodor and turned his head away.

Vera Dragonoff got upon her feet as soon as possible and shook her jeweled hand at the palace.

"Brute!" she roared to Ursus. "You would not help me. Do you not know that I am the Princess Dragonoff?"

The Cossack did not seem to hear; though the words roared in his ears, and he struck a statuesque attitude and laughed within the depths of his soul. When at last he turned his face toward the street, he saw a figure flitting away, and in the light caught the glitter of jewels which adorned a white hand.

Inside the palace, Feodor was leaning against the wall like an overgrown boy, his whole frame shaking with merriment.

CHAPTER X.

RUSSAN, THE WOLF.

WHEN the great Empress learned of the Princess Dragonoff's ejectment from the Carloff palace, she had full control of herself, for her countenance did not change. The enraged Princess did not have to color her narrative, for it was exciting enough when told in plain words.

Catherine did not like to harbor the thought that this beautiful Countess was to baffle her in her designs upon Paul, and deep in her soul she saw but one way to triumph.

"I will see that the tables are turned on the Carloff," she assured Vera. "You shall not go unavenged, my dear Princess. You have your Empress's promise on that score."

"Must I go back?" asked Dragonoff. "If your majesty wills, I will take up my old station, and this woman shall feel the Dragonoff hatred."

"Leave it to me," was the reply from the throne. "Those who offend Catherine of Russia always repent of their folly."

That was enough for Vera. She retired from the Winter palace, and once more sought her own palace, where in copious draughts of wine she tried to drown her defeat.

At the same time in another part of St. Petersburg, Magda, Xenia's servant, was carrying out the wishes of her mistress. The girl was stout, ruddy, and pretty, and had the cunning of her Northern race.

In pursuit of knowledge, she dropped into an open cabaret on the Moika and took an obscure seat. The room was well filled with gaudily attired officers and well-dressed women, and Magda, running her eyes over the assemblage, settled upon a young man whom she knew. In response to her look Lieutenant Yoleff left his seat and came over to her.

"I see you are out of your cage," said he, smiling upon the girl. "Did you break a bar, or was the door left open?"

"Neither," replied Magda, with a captivating smile. "One does not always find the Carloff palace a prison."

"But 'tis said the Countess does."

"Is that street gossip?"

"Street and barrack talk," retorted Yoleff, who was a handsome fellow with an eye for beauty and adventure, such as were always to be found in the capital on the Neva. "When one fascinates the great Empress, all rivals must stand aside."

"But pray," said Magda, leaning across the table, "what has this to do with the Countess?"

"Everything, girl. She has netted Major Daroski, and because he will not give her up she is a captive bird within her own gilded cage."

"What will happen if the Major does not surrender his love?"

"What has already happened?" cried Yoleff. "The arrest of one Ivan Panine, an exile. A sledge departed but a few hours since for the Siberian frontier, and wrapped in a few rags, this same Panine was feeling the snow in his face."

"So soon?" It was with difficulty that Magda leashed her feelings.

"The Empress has the spring of the leopard," smiled the young officer. "I fancy your mistress will travel next."

"And Daroski?"

"Oh, no! He will be promoted, so rumor asserts, and the next thing you hear he will be attached to the palace."

"As favorite?"

"Why not?"

"But the Empress has Count Orloff."

"'Tis hinted that the Count is to travel for his health," smirked the Lieutenant. "Trust our royal mother to play her cards well," and he burst into a laugh.

Magda got away as soon as possible, and in a short time was knocking at Paul's abode. The young man sprang from his chair at sight of her.

"You, Magda?" he exclaimed, coloring with pleasure. "What good fortune has wafted you hither?"

"I am out for the Countess," returned the girl. "I am to gather all the news I can find and——"

"And you have come to me for some?"

"I have come in order that I may assure my dear mistress of your safety."

"Heaven bless you, girl! What has happened at the palace?"

"Nothing but the coming of our new guest."

"A new guest, eh?"

"The Princess Dragonoff."

Paul's cheeks lost color. "And she is tolerated?" he cried, his dark eyes flashing fire.

"Tolerated because she comes direct from the great Empress," answered Magda, in suppressed tones.

"I see, a spy," and Paul's lips stiffened. "The discovery of the escape was most unfortunate. But for Dragine's coterie of shadowers we would now be in paradise. You will carry a message to your mistess, girl?"

"With pleasure."

Paul, glancing around the room, took a small tablet from his pocket, and wrote thereon a few words hastily. Then sealing it with a lover's kiss he handed it to the maid. Magda concealed it beneath her bodice with a smile, and went on with the conversation. At length she bade Paul good night and set out for home.

"They must not rob me of my treasure," she thought, as she breasted the piercing winds. "I have that which is dear to my Countess, for did not her lover seal it with his own lips?"

On, on she went, and soon reached one of the splendid bridges that spanned the Neva. Not until then did she perceive any one behind her.

"I am followed," she gasped, when she saw a figure approaching her with cat-like tread. "Dragine's spies never sleep," and with this she quickened her steps.

Near the end of the bridge she found the figure almost within arm's reach of her.

"My bird?" said a voice that seemed to curdle her blood. "Why so swift in flight?"

Magda stopped and confronted the man, a wiry litle soul not up to her in height, but for all that the very impersonation of a midnight spy. She felt her indignation rise. She burned to seize this fellow and toss him into the river.

"Well?" she demanded, as he came up.

"Well, yourself," echoed the man. "Does your mistress, the lovely Carloff, send you out often on midnight missions?"

"What is it to you?" demanded Magda in return.

"More than you think, my pretty bird. Come, stand out in the light and let me search you."

"You, brute?"

Despite the cold Magda felt her cheeks grow hot.

"Don't touch me!" she cried, drawing back. "Why, I could toss you into the Neva."

"I'll admit I'm no giant," grinned the fellow, "You might beat me at a wrestle, but I'm armed with authority."

"I'd like to know who would arm with authority a pygmy like you."

"I'm Russan, the Wolf."

"And no doubt your snarl is worse than your bite," laughed the girl, whose strength was coming back in leaps and bounds. "Go back to your kennel——"

"Not till I've searched you. You have the letter which the young officer gave you."

Magda started. The man knew. He had witnessed the scene in Paul's room.

"Come, the letter!" repeated the police spy. "Deliver it, my bird, and you may resume your flight."

He was about to lay hands upon her, when her own shot out, and before the Wolf could ward off the contact he was gripped and lifted clear of the stones.

"Give you what I've got?" cried Magda, at his ear. "Surrender my mistress's letter? Not for a world of wolves like you!"

Russan squirmed in her tightening clutch. He saw that he was no match for this powerful Muscovite lass, whose face almost touched his own and whose eyes sparkled like the glittering ice-bits that capped the snow.

"Do you really want the letter?" cried Magda, in derision. "My dear Russan, are you as anxious as you were a moment ago?"

"It is the letter or a dungeon for you!" hissed back the man.

"And a bath for you, Russan, the Wolf."

Madga carried him to the coping of the bridge and pushed him over its edge. He gave a scream as he saw the rolling water beneath, with here and there dancing cakes of ice.

"You'll not let me fall?" he gasped.

"Why shouldn't I?" asked Madga. "Do you still want the letter?"

"Yes."

He tried once more to twist his little body out of her hands, but the attempt was failure. Seeing this he snarled in her face from the depths of his maddened soul:

"I beg your pardon! I called you a bird. You are a Tartar hussy!"

"Better that than a betrayer of confidence," answered Magda. "Good night, my dear Russan," and the little spy shot downward and was engulfed by the waters that seemed to rejoice over their prey.

Magda leaned over the coping and saw Russan battle with the ice.

"Now for home!" she cried. "The thief didn't get what he wanted," and she bounded up the street, scattering the snow right and left from her flying feet.

CHAPTER XI.

A VERY BRIEF WOOING.

FROM Paul!" cried the Countess Xenia, when Magda placed in her hands the letter which she had guarded so well. "He is safe yet!" and the beautiful woman pressed her lips to the missive.

There was a waiting look in Magda's eyes, and as Xenia turned to her she exclaimed:

"I had to fight to keep the letter. I was followed."

A whiteness came instantly to Xenia's cheeks.

"And what became of the spy?" she asked anxiously.

"The good Neva took him."

"What, you threw him into the water?"

"Why not, my mistress?" laughed Magda, displaying her brawny arms. "Think you I am not strong enough to cope with a pygmy?"

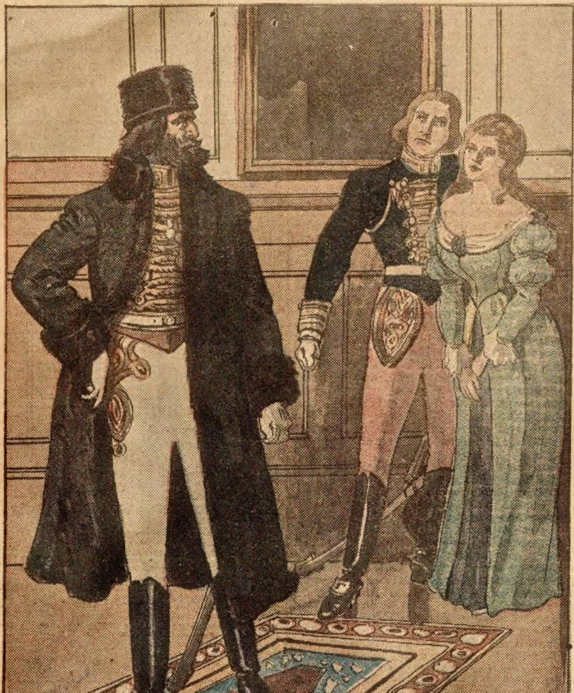
"But the man may drown."

"Then the Empress will have one hound less to pay," grinned the triumphant girl. "It was not much of a task. He was almost as light as a feather, although as wiry as a cat. He called himself Russan, the Wolf."

"I've heard of this man. Paul once told me about his wondrous deeds."

"Lucifer protects his own, so I think Russan, the Wolf, got out of the Neva."

Xenia turned once more to the letter and the girl withdrew.



"My presence answers you!"

After assuring her that he was safe, Paul went on to say that they would yet outwit the Empress and that the future had in store for them many days of happiness. But Xenia was not so sure of this. She knew too well the power of Catherine, than whom a more revengeful woman never wore a crown. Again and again she read the missive, until every word was burned into her brain, as it were.

Now that the Princess Dragonoff had been thrown bodily from the palace by Feodor, Xenia wondered if she was to have another jaileress. Perhaps the Dragonoff would be sent back to her post, and when the Countess thought of this she resolved not to have that creature under her roof, even if it brought from the great Empress an order to depart for Siberia.

In the midst of her meditation she heard the jingle of bells, and then the music as suddenly ceased. Springing to her feet she bounded to a front window and tore aside the heavy curtains. Beyond the giant figure of Ursus she saw a sleigh before the palace, and as she gazed a man alighted and looked up at the walls.

"Colonel Poniatowski, the man whom Catherine has destined for my husband!" cried Xenia, recoiling with an inward gasp.

The man ascended the steps, and at sight of him the giant form of Ursus straightened and presented arms. The handsomely dressed officer saluted coldly. In another minute the Countess heard the door open to admit her visitor, and then his voice in the hall. Feodor entered the room where she stood white and motionless as a statue.

"Colonel Poniatowski," said the big fellow, with a look of unconcealed disgust. "Shall I throw him out, too, mistress?"

"No, Feodor. Admit him."

The name of this Pole was known throughout the empire. He was a man who had done Catherine great service in several wars, a tall, cold-eyed but handsome man of forty, an inveterate gambler and libertine, and one who was cordially hated wherever he was known.

He entered the room with a springy step, and swept his hat near the floor in an obsequious bow to the girl. Xenia returned the greeting stiffly.

"Since you are not accessible beyond your palace, my dear Countess, I have come to pay my respects to you," began the Pole, narrowly regarding Xenia from the corners of his flashing dark eyes. "I trust the visit of Colonel Nicholas Poniatowski is not objectionable."

The beautiful Russian swallowed her resentment.

"Is it not rather late for a call, Colonel?" she replied, glancing at a clock that ticked musically on the wall.

"Friendship and love keep no note of time," was the response. "I have just left the play, and could not resist the opportunity to bask for a few moments in the sunlight of your fair countenance."

Xenia's disgust at this twaddle was observable upon her pallid face. Poniatowski dropped into a chair, letting his sword fall lightly to the carpet.

Xenia noticed that he had been to the cabaret as well as to the opera, for flushed faces and sparkling eyes too often tell the story of wine. She remained standing.

"My dear Countess," resumed the Colonel, "it is the wish of our great and good Empress that I become a suitor for your hand. Colonel Poniatowski is not unknown to you. I stand high in the great Empress's favor. My sword has won the decorations I am proud to wear. And as to my family, there is not a blot on our escutcheon."

This stilted speech drew a smile to the lips of the girl who heard it through in silence.

"Is that all, Colonel?" she asked.

"Is it not enough, adorable one? What more could you ask in a husband?"

There was a soft footstep beyond the door, and the quick ear of Xenia caught it. She knew that Feodor was there, and that his fingers itched to transport the Colonel to the street.

"The Empress, then, presumes that I need a lord?" she said, looking down upon her visitor who was coolly lighting a cigar.

"All St. Petersburg thinks the same," said he, casting the light away.

"A lady should make her selection, don't you think, Colonel?"

"Usually so," he stammered, his voice becoming thicker. "But the wish of the great Empress is a command."

"Oh! Then my husband has been chosen?"

"In the person of Poniatowski."

"I see." Xenia's figure seemed to increase an inch in stature. "I am to become the wife of the Empress's selection."

"Such is her wish, my dear Countess."

"And this is to be your courtship?"

"Yes, beautiful one," and Poniatowski flicked the ash from his cigar.

"You will return to your royal mistress and say that the Countess Carloff is flattered by the distinction she has received, but that she declines it."

It required a full minute for these words to percolate through the Colonel's brain.

"What!" he exclaimed, when he had grasped their meaning. "Is it possible that you reject this great alliance?"

"I reject it."

He was on his feet now, his hand crushing the weed in his rage, and his baleful eyes dancing with madness.

"It is the first time Nicholas Poniatowski has been insulted by a woman!" he exclaimed.

"It will not be the last, I fear, if you continue your love-making at the command of the Empress."

"Furies!" was the retort. "I stoop when I offer you my hand."

"And I lower myself when I mate with your kind."

Words more biting never fell from the lips of a woman. Xenia had resolved that there should be no mincing of words with this sworded tool of the Empress. She knew what it might lead to, but her will was strong, her resolution made, and she would not recede an inch.

"Where there is no mutual love there shall be no mating," she went on, before he could find his tongue. "I could never love you, Colonel Poniatowski. I prefer to remain the Countess Xenia Carloff."

"Or the wife of the cowardly Major of the Preojenski Guards!" hissed the drunkard.

From white to red, and a deep crimson it was, went the face of Xenia Carloff.

"You dare not repeat those words to him!" she exclaimed. "Brave as you are said to be, you dare not face the Major of the Preojenski Guards and fling your lie into his teeth."

"I dare!" almost shouted Poniatowski, laying his hand on his sword-hilt. "Where is he now?"

"You should thank your stars that he is not here."

The doorknob turned.

"It is my wish that you depart, Colonel," continued Xenia. "This interview, unsought by me, is very distasteful."

"But you should obey your Empress."

"In anything but the disposal of myself I stand ready to obey her."

"Catherine will insist, my dear Countess——"

"It will be a useless insistence," was the quick interruption. "I am not to be forced to the altar at a woman's whim."

"Tnen take the consequences!" cried the Colonel. "I have offered you the hand of a Poniatowski——"

"Which hand I hear more than one princess has refused."

He came toward her with an oath on his lips. The door swung slightly ajar, and a glance showed Xenia the grinning and eager face of the faithful Feodor.

"Yonder is the door, and beyond it your sleigh, Colonel," said Xenia, in tones of stern dismissal. "I will hear no more."

"But, my dear lady——"

Feodor's face was projected across the threshold.

"Never mind, Feodor," said Xenia, with a gesture. "The Colonel is going. His visit has been very pleasant." How sarcastic she was! "Good night and pleasant dreams, my dear Colonel," and she turned away.

Feodor drew off disappointed, and the man who went down the steps tumbled into his sleigh, shouted a volley of curses into the driver's ears, and was off like a bolt.

CHAPTER XII.

AN IMPERIAL UKASE.

THE cheeks of Paul Daroski must have burned at the moment when Colonel Poniatowski hurled into Xenia's teeth the words "the cowardly Major of the Preojenski Guards," and had he been present the epithet would have been resented in a manner that individual would long have remembered.

To know that the Countess had not yet felt the full power of the Empress was a relief to him. But at the same time he knew that she had more than one stroke in reserve, and the bolt might be sent at any time. He, too, had learned that Ivan Panine had been returned to the mines, and this still furtner strengthened his resolve not to be drawn into Catherine's snare, no matter what allurements she threw out.

He burned to see Xenia, after sending the letter by Magda. His fertile brain had been evolving a plan by which they could escape the vengeance of the Empress, and he was desirous of laying it before her. But the Carloff palace was still guarded, and on the front steps stood the giant Ursus, who might not be bribed the second time.

Paul, therefore, upon the night following the events recorded in the preceding chapter, determined to reach the Countess. He waited until the clocks of the city were striking twelve, and then sallying forth from his abode, he made his

(Continued on page twenty-six.)

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HIS AWKWARD FINISH

By ARTHUR W. PEACH

TWO big lights glared in front of him; he started to side-step, only to feel as if he had been caught by a gigantic hand; then followed a sensation of being hurled through space. After that there was darkness.

When Shanley opened his eyes, two things slowly crept into his consciousness—one, that it was daylight; another, that he felt as if he had been pounded with a hammer all over. Then his quick mind brightened perfectly. He had been going along the shadowy avenue when the big car came, and he knew that he had not been quick enough to get out of the way, with the result that he had very naturally been hit.

But where under the sun was he? He lifted his head and looked around. The room he was in looked strangely familiar. Suddenly the truth dawned upon him, and the shock was equal to that of the machine. He was in bed, in the room of the house that he had very cleverly and neatly burglarized the night before.

The thought would have floored him if he had not been in a place that prevented it. He had food for thought now. He peered cautiously from the shelter of his cover, intending to simulate sleep in order to get a longer time to think if any one appeared; but there was silence in the hall and in the room.

There was no doubt about it whatever; there was the chiffonier from which he had taken the costly bracelet, whose value made him gasp when he looked at it.

"Shades of Hades! but I'm in for it!" he muttered. "Wouldn't it jar you? Here in the dugout I skinned!"

A very slight cough made him start and turn, and he saw a vision of a girl in the doorway that made him gasp. Shanley, better known in a certain section of a city as "Lefty," was an expert in noting the beauty of a woman; and he realized that a very beautiful girl, bronze-haired, with a complexion that matched the hair, having a faint tinge of gold due to much outdoor life was before him. Her eyes caught "Lefty:" they were twinkling eyes of a deep brown.

He waited for her, as was wise for a man in his situation; in fact, wise for any man who has to play against an unknown hand.

"Good morning," she said, and her eyes lost their twinkle and were brown and serious. She came in a little and lifted the curtain. Shanley was glad he had been shaved. "Father felt pretty bad about running into you last night, and he gave me orders before going to the city to be sure and make everything comfortable for you. The doctor said last night you would come out all right, he was sure; he said no bones were broken, but that you were hit pretty solidly on the head and were rather bruised."

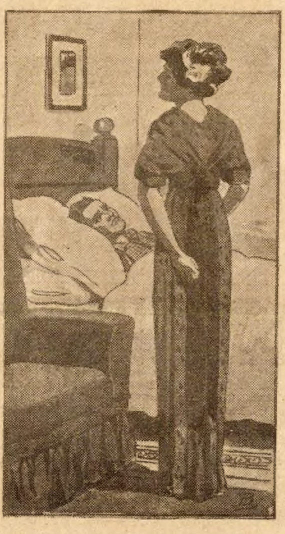
He dropped his usual slang, and his voice was that of a fairly well educated gentleman. "I do feel a little stiff, but otherwise I'm all right. I imagine I could walk after a little."

"Father wanted everything done for you; you see we were rather excited last night. We had been in the city and were coming back very late—it must have been about four o'clock—when we ran into you."

Shanley was lining up something to say in explanation of the fact that he was around at that hour in a suburban village, but she went on without hesitation.

"I'll have something sent up for you to eat."

She was gone. All Shanley could do was to express himself by means of a few short words describing the fix he was in. They must have discovered the burglary; she had said they were excited. Then, too, there was the big grip of stuff he had taken; they must have found it when they picked him up. Then another thought flashed through his mind, a thought that made him draw himself up sharply. The effort hurt, and he saw that motion was not going to be easy. The thought was this: Were they holding him there until officers came from the city to arrest him? If that were the case, the quicker he departed, the better for him; but a glance told him there was not a thing in sight that he could wear on the street, and he was clothed at present in a pair of pajamas. No use.



"Good morning," she said.

As he was planning some move to get hold of some male attire somewhere, a maid entered with his breakfast.

When he had finished—and he made a thorough affair of it even if by the fitness of things he should not have—the girl entered again, and sat down near the window. Was she keeping an eye on him? Shanley thought it looked much that way.

"You are to keep quiet until the Doctor comes and looks you over again," she said, smiling a little. "Father was worried lest you feel in the mood to file a damage suit against him——"

"Not me!" Shanley said, thinking that once he got out of sight he would never show up again—if he did get away. Things looked funny.

"I neglected to tell you that we had a visitor last night, and that's the reason why you didn't get the best of care. We were excited."

Her brown eyes were upon him, but his look of surprise was a masterpiece. "That so? I hope not over me——"

"No, not all over you. The house was burglarized, and all our precious stuff taken. He must have been a master hand at it."

His surprise was overwhelming.

"I don't wonder that you are astonished. I'd like to see how a man looks who does that sort of thing. I suppose they have big jaws and thick lips, and are ugly—or are they nice-looking?"

"I never had very much to—I couldn't say really. You see we—keep just as far from those fellows as we can; but I understand some of them are pretty good-looking chaps."

"I wonder," she said seriously. "I never saw one yet that was—of course, I see them in the papers once in a while. I think they ought to be in jail—all of them—or hung. Don't you?"

"Yes, it would be good for some of them——"

"'Some of them?'" she repeated.

"No, I'm not strong on this hanging; I'd rather see all of them in jail," he hastened to say.

Thus the conversation went on, and if ever "Lefty" Shanley was stumped to know whether one was "guying" him or not, he was stumped by the brown-eyed girl who put him through a course of examination as to his opinion of life in general. There was a twinkle in her eyes, he could swear, once in a while, though he did not look very often, for it's not an easy matter to agree that you are worthy to suffer various torments that the law inflicts on a certain class of its subjects.

When she had gone again, Shanley admitted he was fazed. But he came to the conclusion that, naturally, she was excited and interested in the subject of burglars in general, as a result of having one close at hand the night past. He decided, too, that when the car hit him, the grip which contained his "haul" must have been thrown aside into the hedge near the place he was struck. That explanation cleared his mind; he could get by if that evidence did not show up.

The Doctor came, looked him over, and said that all was necessary for him was a good massage to loosen up the sore tendons. So he sent up a man who did the job thoroughly. Shanley was tough, and though his head swam a little, and he walked with a limp, he decided that he would make tracks as soon as possible.

He told her of his intentions, fearing a little that here was where the blow-up might occur, but she agreed if "he was sure he would not hurt himself."

He dressed himself, making sure that everything was in his pockets just as he had left them. He found it that way, and he decided that he had been worrying for nothing, that she had simply thought of him as a man hurt through their carelessness, and therefore meriting their care. He planned, after he was dressed, to walk around by the hedge, and nab the grip in short time. He began to have compunction about taking the stuff, and he decided he would send back what he had taken belonging to her. She was a pretty girl, and she had used him "white."

She went to the door with him and stopped; then she told him to wait a minute and went back. When she returned, she held something out to him—his grip!

That he didn't fall backward was due to the fact he was waiting at ease, half standing, half reclining on the steps. But he did stand there with jaw down to hear her say:

"I picked it up while father was putting you in the car. When he got here, he was so excited he didn't notice you had taken our jewelry. I discovered it, but I thought I wouldn't say anything; it seemed so romantic to have a real burglar in the house, and you were jolly, too, and I had a lot of fun talking to you. Good-by, Mr. Burglar!"

The door closed, as Shanley instinctively touched his hat. He tightened his grip on the satchel, now empty, and went down the walk, thankful from his heart up and down, that some one had for once seen the romantic side of his profession. But at the first corner two policemen stepped out. Both were smiling.

"Sure an' she had a lot of fun wid ye 'Lefty,' but here's where she directed us to come into th' play. Jus' put these bracelets on y'r wrists an' come wid us," said one of the officers, and "Lefty" walked away between them.

* * *

He Knew Him Well.

It was a contested-will case, and one of the witnesses, in the course of giving his evidence, described the testator minutely.

"Now, sir," said the counsel for the defense, "I suppose we may take it, from the flattering description you have given of the testator, his good points, and his personal appearance generally, that you were intimately acquainted with him?"

"Him?" exclaimed the witness. "He was no acquaintance of mine!"

"Indeed! Well, then you must have observed him very carefully whenever you saw him?" pursued counsel.

"I never saw him in my life," was the reply.

This prevarication, as counsel thought it, was too much, and he said:

"Now, now, don't trifle with the court, please! How, I ask you, could you, in the name of goodness, describe him so minutely if you never saw him or never knew him?"

"Well," replied the witness, and the smile which overspread his features extended to the faces of those in court, "you see, I married his widow."

Peculiar After Effects of Grip This Year.

Leaves Kidneys In Weakened Condition.

Doctors in all parts of the country have been kept busy with the epidemic of grip which has visited so many homes. The symptoms of grip this year are often very distressing and leave the system in a run down condition, particularly the kidneys which seem to suffer most, as almost every victim complains of lame back and urinary troubles which should not be neglected, as these danger signals often lead to dangerous kidney troubles. Druggists report a large sale on Dr. Kilmer's Swamp-Root which so many people say soon heals and strengthens the kidneys after an attack of grip. Swamp-Root is a great kidney, liver and bladder remedy, and, being an herbal compound, has a gentle healing effect on the kidneys, which is almost immediately noticed in most cases by those who try it. Dr. Kilmer & Co., Binghamton, N. Y. offer to send a sample size bottle of Swamp-Root, on receipt of ten cents, to every sufferer who requests it. A trial will convince any one who may be in need of it. Regular size bottles 50cts. and $1.00. For sale at all druggists. Be sure to mention this paper.

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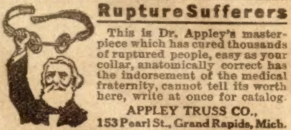

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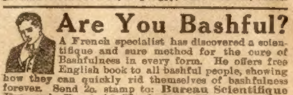

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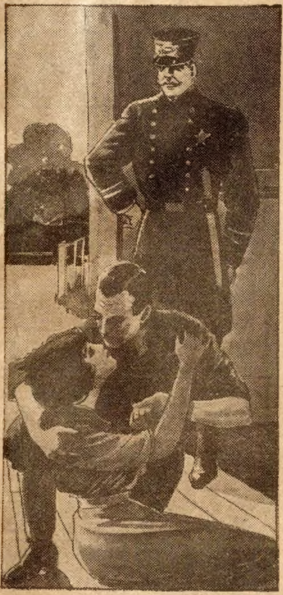
The Clam Digger

Or, A Cedar River Mystery - By Willis E. Link



She was in his arms.

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CHAPTER XV.

A CLEARING-UP STORM.

AS NATHAN tiptoed into the Grundy kitchen, where we remember we left him, he listened intently. Not the faintest sound came to his ears. His trepidation ceased and a desire to investigate was again upon him. He cautiously flashed his light, and it revealed worse disorder than had been evident the beginning of the night. A consciousness that he was once again alone in the house came to him. So strong was this that he ventured to flash a light into the bedroom where the couple usually slept. The bed was empty, as he more than half expected to find. For a moment Nathan stood in a perplexed state of mind. What were the Grundys doing? Had they fled the house either temporarily or permanently? Perhaps they might return again at any moment. This thought moved Nathan to action, and he quickly stepped from the house of mystery out into the night. The rain had ceased, and through scattering breaks in the clouds some stars were twinkling.

When again in his cabin, Nathan threw himself upon his couch, but not to sleep. His brain was working too busily for slumber. The morning light would soon be breaking, and at the dawn he wished to hurry into the city. He would now see the superintendent of police, and give a full account of what he had seen and what he suspected. With this fully determined upon, Nathan fell asleep.

When he awoke the sun was high in the heavens. He was provoked at himself when he realized the time of day. It seemed as if many valuable hours had been lost. When had he so peacefully slumbered? Not since Pearl had gone to her watery grave. It was treason to her memory, so to forget and rest.

Hastily preparing a cup of coffee and poaching an egg, his breakfast was soon dispatched. Within an hour he walked into the office of the superintendent of police. That individual was strongly interested in what Nathan had to communicate.

"It seems probable that the Grundys are the three footpads who have so far eluded us," remarked the chief, as he lay back in his big leather chair with his eyes partially closed and slowly drew at a half-consumed cigar, "but the Ames matter is what I cannot fathom as yet."

Nathan looked an inquiry he did not speak.

"Granting that the Grundy gang abducted and murdered Miss Ames," the superintendent went on, as if answering the unspoken question, "they could just as well have buried her dead body where it never would have been found. Why did they not do so? They seemed to have taken special pains to let people know she was dead. Why? But your supposition about Bessie seems reasonable, and it is queer what has become of her. Well, we will investigate things at once. They are outside the city limits, so I will consult with the sheriff. No doubt we shall soon have the house searched and the three Grundys apprehended."

This ended the interview and Nathan left the office. In an hour two officers were in an automobile speeding over the ground on their way to the Grundy farm. Nathan was nearly back to his cabin when the machine with its occupants swept by. It was unendurable to remain alone, so he trudged on after the officers.

The two men had barely pulled away from the police headquarters when a young lady entered the superintendent's office.

"I am Bettie Smith, of Marshalltown," she introduced herself to the chief of the police force. "I have been working in a restaurant there"—here she gave the name and location—"so you can verify some statements, if you wish to do so. After deep consideration, I have decided it is my duty to come to you with a story I wish to tell."

"Proceed." The superintendent was favorably impressed with this young and pretty visitor, and he waved his hand toward a chair.

"While working in the restaurant," began Bettie, as she sank into the indicated chair, "I became acquainted with Mr. Henry Ames, of St. Paul." At the mention of this name the superintendent pricked up his ears, figuratively speaking. "Last evening a young man came in with him whom Mr. Ames called Sam Grundy," continued Bettie, and the listening official was now all attention. "They secured a room over the restaurant for an hour, because of the rain, and had a conversation there. My room adjoins, and I overheard the men as they talked."

Bettie mentally told herself there was no need to go into certain particulars she might find it embarrassing to relate—at least, at the present time.

"In this conversation I learned that Mr. Ames had hired the Grundys to make way with Miss Pearl Ames." The superintendent was now upon his feet and his eyes were riveted upon Bettie. "The deed was done according to agreement, but Mr. Ames was unwilling or unable to pay the agreed price. Something has frightened the Grundy family, and they have fled from their home. Sam told Mr. Ames they would pass through Marshalltown last night, only he would risk one more day in Waterloo for some purpose I do not understand. He was with Mr. Ames to implore him for money, so that his folks would have something to help themselves with on their journey and when they reached their destination, as they were leaving practically everything behind. Mr. Ames professed to be unable to help them any. Sam at last left the room, angry and disappointed, and he may have been on the same train I took in coming here. As I said before, I think it my duty to tell you this, and now that I have done so, I will not take any more of your time." Bettie was upon her feet and started to depart.

"One moment, Miss Smith," cried the aroused superintendent. "I wish to thank you for this information. I assure you it is of the utmost value to several of us. I may wish to communicate with you again. If so, where may we find you?"

For an instant Bettie hesitated, then she replied: "You will find me at Mr. Hamburg's, about a mile north of Grundy's, where I expect to visit for a few days." Returning the courteous "good-by" of the chief, she stepped out upon the street.

A street car would carry her nearly halfway to her destination, and she boarded one. Another car happened to be following not far behind, and Henry Ames boarded this. He had lost sight of Bettie in the crush at the depot, and had been vainly wandering the streets in search of her. Catching sight at last of the object of his quest, he determined to follow her to her destination. Blindly he was pursuing, with no plan definitely outlined, but foolishly hoping something might arise which he could turn to his advantage in this one great passion of his life.

The car line swung around to a bridge across the river in the northern suburbs of the city. Just after crossing the bridge, Bettie alighted, and Henry followed suit when his car reached the same place. The girl had started along the road toward the north, and took no notice of what might be occurring behind. Thus, skulking behind the bushes here and there along the road, the infatuated man trailed along after the magnet of his heart. Nathan Talbot's cabin was passed, and the Grundy house was partially visible through the trees.

As for Nathan, he had been at the old building for half an hour. When he arrived the officers had about completed their search, but had made no discovery of special importance. Nothing had been disturbed since the occupants had left the house the night before.

The officers had about decided to return to the city, as there appeared to be nothing to claim their attention, when two men in an automobile came rapidly up to the dwelling.

"The boss says you may as well get back to the office," announced one of the newcomers. "He has found out the Grundy gang has vamosed the country—except Sam—and if you have not struck a big lead here, come on in."

The speaker, who was acting as chauffeur, was about to turn his machine around and spin back into the city, when he halted to listen with the others to a cry that came from out the woods some distance away. It seemed to be the shout of a man for assistance. Several times the cry echoed indistinctly, then came silence.

"Is some one in the river drowning?" questioned one of the men.

"No," answered Nathan, "for that runs more to one side." The shout sounded nearer.

Still undecided as to what the voice might mean, the men listened intently. In another moment a man burst through the underbrush skirting the patch of timber, and wildly beckoned with his arms.

"Jump in, Talbot," said the chauffeur of the just arrived automobile, "and we will get over there and see what is up."

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The machine sped away toward the excited man.

As the three in the flying vehicle drew near the still gesticulating individual, Nathan recognized him as John Worker.

"Oh, my God, hurry!" the men heard John cry. "Something terrible is wrong over yonder," he pointed back into the woods. Not being able to drive the machine farther in the underbrush, the men jumped to the ground and rushed forward.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE CURTAIN IS RUNG DOWN.

AS THE men followed John Worker, he brokenly explained matters. He had taken a few hours off and had come down to the river to fish. He had cut across lots and through the strip of woods. On the way he passed an old shack built by some hunters and fishers a few years before, and used by them during a few weeks' summer vacation. Since then it had been sometimes used during a storm or a few hours' bivouac by strolling sportsmen, but it was rapidly going to ruin. Something impelled him to look inside the shack. He was nearly paralyzed by seeing a dead woman lying there. When he could get his voice, he impulsively cried for assistance—but he was getting control of himself now. By this time the party had arrived at the dilapidated structure.

The officers entered, followed by Nathan and John. The surrounding trees made the light dimmer than it otherwise would have been and it was a few seconds before the face of the figure upon the floor could be plainly seen. Nathan bent forward, and as his eyes began to distinguish the features, his body stiffened and an expression of incredulity came over his face. The next instant he gave a choking cry of wonder and joy as he sank upon his knees:

"Pearl!"

The cry must have aroused the unconscious girl, for she opened her eyes, and from the lips came the feeble response:

"Nathan!"

The next second she was in his arms, and he was raining kisses upon brow, cheeks and lips—the presence of others was forgotten in the ecstatic joy of the moment.

It was soon decided to take the nearly dead girl to the Grundy home and summon physicians and an ambulance. It was discovered that she was bound hand and foot, as well as tied down to the rotting floor of the shack, and an old dress covered the figure. Carefully and tenderly she was carried to the automobile, and the party slowly started across the field.

The two officers were still waiting—and Bettie had now arrived upon the scene. As the party came up, John stared at the pretty brunette, but the next instant he rushed forward and clasped her in his arms, with the glad exclamation:

"Bessie!"

Down in her heart the girl would not have objected to this warm greeting, but there were others present.

"Wait until some other time, John," she whispered, and released herself.

At this juncture a big automobile came tearing up with the superintendent of police, Mr. Ames, and several other gentlemen. It was soon learned that Sam Grundy had been arrested and had made a full confession—and Nathan's wonderful pearl had been recovered. Just then there was no time for particulars, for Pearl was in a too critical condition for delay. Soon she was carefully supported by her father and Nathan as the big machine sped back into the city. Words never can tell the joy of the mother when she knew her loved one was alive and once more in the sheltering walls of home.

It was days after the exciting events at the Grundy house that all the details in regard to various things became known. We will briefly recapitulate, and add some items of information we think would prove of interest.

As Pearl was going home, the night of her disappearance, and had arrived under the shadow of the big trees, a blanket was thrown over her head from behind her and her cries stifled She was placed in a light wagon and rapidly driven away. Arriving at the Grundy home—she did not then know the persons or the place—she was stripped of most of her clothing and an old dress substituted. All day she was held a prisoner in the cyclone cave. At night she was taken out of the underground cell and placed in a bedroom in the attic, where bars had been nailed over the window. This was formerly Bessie's room. The prisoner managed to break a pane of glass and cry for Nathan—the first word that came to her lips. She was immediately taken from this room and returned to the cave; the bars were removed from the bedroom window. The unfortunate girl passed terrible hours in this dungeon, although food and water were brought her. Sometimes she would try to comfort herself by singing her church hymns; sometimes she would pray. Then came the night when she was taken to the old shack in the woods and left bound upon the floor. She had cried for help, but no one was near that night to hear the weak, despairing voice. Exhausted at last, she became unconscious of everything until aroused by Nathan's cry. After this life and death struggled for mastery, but loving care and skillful physicians helped to turn the tide to health and strength. Perhaps love was the most powerful restorative. In time the dreams of the whilom clam digger all came true—more than that, for it is Ames & Co. now.

We left Sam in a frenzy of excitement down by the old mill. When he rushed forward to seize the object the boy was dragging from the water, it was a muddy, water-soaked feather pillow. Quickly tearing it open he grabbed at a small box concealed in the dirty mess. He had not noticed a squad of police coming around the old mill, and as he was about to thrust the box into his pocket, his arms were pinioned, and the next instant handcuffs were upon his wrists. He fought desperately to retain the box, but it was taken from him. On being opened, a magnificent pearl was found within—no doubt the one stolen from Nathan.

From Sam's confession it was learned that he suspected Nathan had found some pearls. He, Sam, determined to enter the cabin and find them. A plain lock was easily worked by a duplicate key, and while Nathan was in the river out of sight, the cabin was entered. Sam was astonished at the magnitude of his find. He took the pearl home and did not tell the rest of the family. He concealed the box in his pillow. He dreamed of disposing of the pearl and then marrying Bessie. When he understood that the girl had fled, he rushed to his room to get the pearl so as to dispose of it in some way, and with the proceeds track Bessie down. When he discovered the pillow gone, it flashed into his mind that he had noticed such a rest under the head of the creature in the boat as it went over the dam. Hence his persistent search along the Cedar. When the treasure was found, he would search for Bessie. Then—God only knows the secrets of this evil mind.

It was a skillfully constructed dummy that went over the dam. Bill thought of this scheme, for he had no relish for committing a murder. He had had one experience, even if he felt justified. The Grundys planned to make it plainly appear that Pearl was no more, then, when Henry Ames was satisfied the deed had been done, collect the price for her murder. The family would scatter, to gather again somewhere in the wilds of Canada. In a few hours after leaving Waterloo, one of the family would send a letter to the chief of police informing him where Pearl could be found—probably alive. Absolute murder would be avoided, and Henry Ames outwitted and exposed. We have seen how their scheme miscarried. When it was evident some one had entered their home, the Grundys were thrown into a panic at the possibility of the discovery of the prisoner in the cyclone cave. Well, the three have some little time yet before they will be free from serving the State in the prison at Fort Madison.

The Grundys were away from home, of course, the night they abducted Pearl. Bessie seized this opportunity to escape from her bondage—and from Sam. She was beginning to have dark suspicions as to the object of these night trips made by the three members of the family. She never saw them depart, but she knew they were often away. Now was her chance. Just as she was leaving, Bill returned for the blanket afterward used. Bessie nearly dropped to the ground in her fright and disappointment. Down deep in Bill's vile heart there was a tiny warm corner for the orphan girl. Bessie felt this, and she appealed to his better nature. When he learned Sam's intentions, Bill was disturbed. He did not know of Sam's stolen wealth, but he did know Bessie would have an awful life as the wife of his son. Aside from this, it would be far better financially for Sam to marry Ella Hamburg, which might possibly be accomplished if Bessie was out of the way.

In the end, Bill gave the girl fifty dollars and promised to remain silent. With the first and only kiss she ever gave her foster-father, Bessie fled into the night. Passing Nathan's cabin, she remembered an incident she had observed less than two days before. She had been cutting across the woods on an errand when she saw Sam hurriedly leave this home of the clam digger. Every action showed secrecy and excitement. Bessie hid herself and watched Sam as he examined something. He grew fairly wild and rushed away. She suspected then that Sam had stolen what pearls Nathan might have found. After Sam's declaration of love, suspicions were turned to a

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certainty in her mind. Under the circumstances she could not tell Nathan and thus show ingratitude to Bill for what he had just done for her. But she would leave a note of warning. She hastily scribbled one in the dark, as she had pencil and paper in a handbag she carried, and thrust it under his door. She hardly knew what she wrote, but she knew the Grundys well enough to throw out a word of caution. She wrote a capital P in the wrong place because her scholarship was not sufficient for her to notice this mistake. Hurrying on, she came to the interurban and took a car for Cedar Falls.

A day or two later she arrived in Marshalltown and found employment at the restaurant. Then came her meeting with Henry Ames. She had heard the Grundys mention his name, and a vague idea possessed her that in some way he was responsible for the tragedy of the Cedar she had read about in the daily newspaper. Perhaps the Grundys were also involved. She determined to encourage an acquaintance with Henry Ames, hoping this would lead to some information. What she would do with the knowledge thus obtained she left to a future decision. She was greatly disturbed when she realized the passion she was inspiring in the heart of the man from St. Paul. She felt it best to dismiss him. Then came the overheard conversation. A gratitude filled her heart for what Bill Grundy had done for her that night, and he had sometimes made her pathway a little smoother in her life at his home. She battled over her gratitude and duty. We will not follow her in her reasoning, but we know the result.

Before the curtain drops, let us return for a few moments to the Grundy house where we left John, Bessie, and some officers. The big automobile had left, and the two remaining machines were being cranked preparatory to a return to the city. Henry Ames had drawn constantly nearer until he had reached the [illegible] clump of bushes behind which Nathan had concealed himself. He did not know where he was, for he had never been at the Grundy place, nor did he know any of the individuals he had seen. He never thought the commotion he had witnessed had anything to do with his prospects, only as what had happened might have affected Bettie. His anxiety and curiosity became unendurable, and he walked up to the little gathering. Bessie did not notice his approach until he was close upon her.

"Why, Mr. Ames!" she exclaimed, in great surprise.

Henry bowed. Nothing seemed to come to him to explain his presence. The officers looked wonderingly at the arrival as they hesitated to depart. Then Bessie blurted out an explanation one part of her nature ever afterward would regret, for she really had no thought of the possible result of her words.

"This is Mr. Ames, of St. Paul, a cousin of Miss Pearl," she said to the waiting officers.

One of the men quickly stepped to the side of the young man

"You are under arrest," quietly stated the representative of the law, and as Henry looked wonderingly at him, he continued, "for conspiracy in attempting the life of Miss Pearl Ames."

"Isn't she dead?" asked the arrested man, apparently bewildered by his surroundings or the statement he had just heard.

"I am glad to say she is not," answered the officer.

"Thank God!" reverently exclaimed Henry, and it was the first time in all his life that he ever had thanked his Creator sincerely for anything

The next moment a wave of despair swept over him. He realized that he faced the yawning gates of the penitentiary and that his bequest was gone forever. Above every other thought, perhaps, was the realization that he never would possess the girl he loved. Something told him that her mate for life stood beside here. All was dark ahead.

The unhappy man thrust his hand into his pocket, then quickly to his head The officer started to act, but he was too late. A report rang out and Henry Ames sank to the ground.

To her dying day Bessie is to be haunted many times by the last look from the glazing eyes and the last words from the whitening lips—a longing, despairing groan:

"Bettie!"

The End

* * *

SUNSHINE.

When a bit of sunshine hits ye after passin' of a cloud,
When a bit of laughter strikes ye, and yer spine's a feelin' proud,
Don't forget to up and fling it at a soul that's feelin' blue,
Fer the minit that ye sling it 'tis a boomerang to you.

* * *

Kept Their Heads.

Lovers' ardors—at least those which find expression through pen and ink—are at their most urgent and persuasive height about February 14. Hearts and darts, flowers and bowers, loves and doves, adore and more besprinkle innumerable versified pages, even in our time.

In early times St. Valentine's Day was wholly a lovers' festival, with which children were not concerned at all. It is amusing to find amid the usual cloying sweetness of valentine literature an occasional canny suitor who kept his head, even while offering his heart. Such, certainly, was the author of these lines "To Melissa:"

If th[illegible] l[illegible]e me, maiden fair,
List w[illegible]le I my love declare;
If thou'lt take me, I am thine,
Lover [illegible] Valentine:
But if thou care naught for me,
For another year I'm free
Till the good saint [illegible],
Bids me choose anot[illegible],
Sharpen me a bett[illegible]
And "Wilt thou" [illegible] to one who will

Although one can but feel he was more concerned to avoid humiliation if rejected than to procure an acceptance, family history records that his Melissa married him. A prose love letter, equally cautious, but cleverer and more famous, is that written in 1661 by Philip Earl of Chesterfield, to Lady Russell:

"Madam—The dulness of this last cold season doth afford nothing that is new to divert you; only here is a report that I fain would know the truth of, which is, that I am extremely in love with you. Pray let me know if it be true or no, since I am certain that no one but yourself can rightly inform me; for if you intend to use me favorably, and do think I am in love with you, I most certainly am so; but if you intend to receive me coldly and do not believe that I am in love, I also am sure that I am not; therefore let me entreat you to put me out of a doubt which makes the greatest concern of, Dear Madam, your most obedient, faithful servant, CHESTERFIELD."

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This Wife and Mother Saved Her Husband Over Ten Years Ago

SHE WILL GLADLY TELL YOU HOW FREE

Write to Her Today. Send No Money. She Has Nothing To Sell

For over 20 years Jas. Anderson of Hillburn, N. Y., was a confirmed drunkard. His case was about as bad as it could be, but a little over ten years ago his devoted wife, after years of trying, finally succeeded in stopping his drinking entirely.

Write to this woman if you have a relative or friend who drinks

Not only did she save Mr. Anderson but she stopped the drinking of her brother and several of her neighbors as well. All this she accomplished with a simple home remedy which any one can get and use. And she now desires to tell every man and woman who has a relative or friend who drinks, just what it is.

It can be given secretly if desired and every reader of this notice who is interested in curing a dear one of drinking should write to Mrs. Anderson at once. Her reply will come by return mail in a sealed envelope. She does this gladly, in hopes that others will be benefited as she was. One thing she asks however, and that is that you do not send money for she has nothing to sell. Her complete address is 166 Hill Ave., Hillburn, N. Y.

NOTE—This offer should be accepted at once by all who have dear ones who drink. In fact, every one who has to contend in any way with drunkenness should know about it. Therefore, if you do not write Mrs. Anderson yourself CUT THIS NOTICE OUT and mail it to a friend who could use her advice. And even though you do answer it, MAIL IT TO SOMEONE ELSE who you think would like to know what Mrs. Anderson used. In other words, let this notice reach as many as possible for Mrs. Anderson will reply to every letter, no matter how many she receives.

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Ask for FREE book of "papers" with each 5c sack.

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Wonder Who's Kissing Her Now
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THOSE DRIED APPLES

By JAMES C. THRELFALL

"HAVE some of the stewed dried apples?" I, the engineer, inquired, passing my dinner-pail over to where "Fat" Lindsay, the boomer fireman, sat on the left-hand side of the cab munching the frugal lunch which the Harvey House had put up for him that morning.

"No, thank you. No DRIED APPLES for mine."

The tone which he put into his refusal of my donation surprised me. The day before "Fat" had accepted with joy the stewed peaches I had shared with him, and the previous day to that he had gone after some of my wife's specially canned blackberries like a hungry pup after a sparerib.

"I beg your pardon," he said: "I shouldn't have been so obstreperous in my emphasis, but I have my special reasons for hating dried apples. Want to hear them."

Lindsay and I were attending to the modest wants of the bridge-foreman's gang that week, and that particular day we had nothing further in the line of duty until quitting time at night, so I put an extra supply of tobacco into my jimmy-pipe and told him to "cut his dog loose."

"Well," he said, as he threw one huge leg over the other, and crossed his two hands behind his head—heavens! wasn't he fat? "The reason I hate dried apples is that they stood between me and the only girl I ever loved, just four handfuls of dried apples, and not very big handfuls at that.

"Oh, you can laugh if you want to!" he went on. "I know it sounds funny, but I guess if you had your mind made up that you wanted a certain girl, it would be just as serious a matter to have dried apples stand between you and the getting of her, as it would be to have an army of soldiers keep you apart."

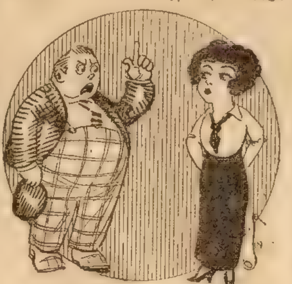
I begged his pardon for my untimely levity, and he proceeded

"It was back in the good old State of Missouri that I was raised to manhood, back in the southwestern part of the State. I don't remember just when I first discovered that I have a love-affair, it just kind of grew up with me.

"Mary Means, the girl in the case, was in my class in school, and before I had finished the Fourth Reader, I had spotted her for the prettiest little 'squab' that ever wore petticoats and pigtails.

"I wasn't the only one that liked her, either. Bill Todd was of the same opinion as I. Bill was my chum, and we willingly shared everything we had in those days but Mary Means, and in between our spells of chumming we had some awful scraps about her, long before we had got into long pants and store shirts.

"And we shared Mary, too, although unwillingly, for she treated us exactly alike. If she chose me during the 'Clap-in and Clap-Out' game at the children's parties, it was pretty sure to be Bill who would be chosen when the game was changed to 'Postoffice



"I used to get sore."

"After we graduated and Bill went to work in his father's store and I got a job firing on the 'Frisco, things ran along in the same way. If I took Mary to the Woodman's dance, it was pretty sure to be Bill who would haul her to the Pythian picnic.

"It was Sunday about with us, and Wednesday night about with us, until I used to get sore and vow that I wouldn't stand it another day. No, sir! and I'd tell Mary that she could take me or leave me, and Bill would get sore and tell her the same thing.

"She'd laugh a little when one of us would pin her down that way, and frown a little, and then she'd say that she was awfully sorry, and that she was really trying to make up her mind, but that we were both such nice boys that she simply could not decide between us.

"I couldn't muster up the courage to quit outright and give Bill a clear field, and he couldn't make up his mind to turn her over to me. We drifted along that way till Bill and I were twenty-five years old.

"They marry young back in southwest Missouri, and I felt that I was about ready for married life that summer for I got promoted to the right-hand side of the cab, and Bill in his turn was given a half-interest in his father's store about the same time, and he felt somewhat similar to the way I did about being ready.

"So one night we went up to her house together, and told her that after the Fourth of July, which was then just two weeks away, there would be but the one of us 'on her string,' and that if she couldn't choose between us by that time, we would both better quit.

"Mary talked reasonably enough with us, and said she could see where we were perfectly right in our point of view, and that she realized she didn't have any right to ask the two of us to dance attendance on her all our lives, and that she would try very hard to give us an answer by the Fourth.

'Maybe you think I didn't walk on eggs for the two weeks that followed. The evening before the Fourth she caught me on the 'phone, and said she wanted to see me up at the house on a matter of importance. I went. I was feeling pretty cocky, for I thought she was going to give me a little advance information about my chances, but when I got within sight of the house, I saw Bill heading in the same direction

"Mary ushered us gravely into the parlor, and began by telling us how hard she had tried during the past two weeks to come to a decision between us, but that she was as much on the fence as ever as to which she liked the best. And then she told us that she had been reading a book that day which had given her the dandiest hunch as to how to cut the Gordian knot of our difficulty

"You know how the princess in the fairy stories used to send the two or more suitors for her hand forth into the world with the assurance that the one who brought back the biggest diamond or the biggest sack of gold or the story of the most remarkable adventure would find her waiting for him on his return.

"Mary had concocted a somewhat similar scheme; only, instead of ranging over the world, Bill and I were to spend the next day in the recesses of Jagger mine, an old deserted hole on the other side of the creek, and the one bringing back the prettiest specimen of ore was to have the privilege of leading Mary over to the Methodist parsonage and settling things for all time.

"Bill and I balked at risking our Life's Happiness in any such way, but it didn't do us any good whatsoever. Mary insisted that her plan was as fair to one of us as the other, and after she came almost to the point of crying once or twice, we gave in and let her have her way.

"The next morning, instead of putting on our good clothes like the rest of our fellow-citizens, Bill and I put on our oldest suits and wore our hobnailed boots, and filling our pockets with candles, started down the old deserted drift toward the inward parts of the earth.

"While the rest of the world was shooting off firecrackers and toy cannons and drinking pink lemonade and soda-pop, Bill and I were picking our way over stray bowlders that lay in the track of the drift, or were crawling over big slabs that had peeled off from the low roof of the mine.

"It had been years since the mine had been used for anything but a picnicking place, and so it was pretty rough traveling for us. There were places that we had to navigate on our hands and knees, and other places where the dripping from the roof wet us to the skin and all but put out our lights.

"We were to report to Mary at three o'clock in the afternoon, so we made the best time that we could. Near the end of the entrance tunnel there is a point where the sides get awfully close together. This place was long ago christened 'Fat Man's Misery.'

"I was the same those days as I am now, plenty big around the waist-line, and I could squeeze through this place and that was about all. I had to turn sidewise to make it, at that.

"After 'Fat Man's Misery' we came to a square sort of a room, with drifts leading off in every direction, and decided to separate. I knew the lay of the mine a little better than Todd did, and by two o'clock I was waiting for him in the big chamber of the mine where we had agreed to meet.

"I wish you could have seen the specimen of ore I had. It was all set with

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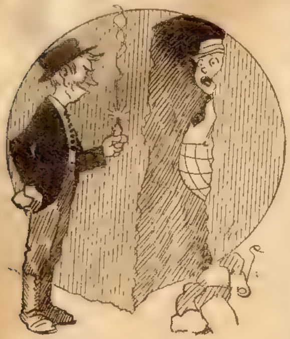
Agent's Directory List, Indiana, Pa.

little crystals of mica and lead and zinc of different colors, and it reflected the rays of the candle like a real necklace of precious stones, so you might guess how it would look in the sunshine. I knew that I had Bill beaten before I saw him come tramping down his drift with a blue look on his face. He showed me his specimen. There wasn't the least comparison between the two.

"He sat down on the slab were I had been waiting his arrival, and sighed kind of mournfully as I showed him my find.

"'It's all off with me,' he said.

"'Sorry, old chap,' I said, kind of tantalizing him. 'There isn't but one fellow living that I'd rather see win her hand than you. Under the circumstances I feel for you.'



"I squeezed and squeezed."

"'Yes you've got me beat, all right,' Bill admitted, and he ran his hand down into his pocket and began munching something.

"Through the excitement of the morning and the early start I had taken, I hadn't had much appetite for breakfast. When I saw Bill eating, I felt as if I could eat a pound of nails.

"'What are you eating,' I asked.

"'Dried apples,' Bill grunted back. 'Want some'.

"'Sure,' said I, and he gave me a handful.

"I ate them. There was a little stream of water trickling through beside the slab where we were sitting, and as the apples made me thirsty, I lay down and drank freely of the water. Then I ate another helping of the apples.

"You know how fat men are. They're generally fond of their eating. That's generally what makes them fat in the first place. Well I ate four handfuls of the dried apples, or till they were all gone.

"When we started for the outside world, I felt a whole lot better. We went stumbling along, Bill in the lead, neither of us saying a word until we came to 'Fat Man's Misery.' Bill walked through, and I turned sidewise to follow; the same way as when I came in."

"Fat" paused long enough in his story to light his pipe.

"Ever eat any dried apples and then drink water immediately after?" he asked me.

I had when a boy.

"Well you know the effect."

I remembered.

"Well, sir, those dried apples made just enough difference in my size so that I couldn't get past that snug place in the drift to save my soul. I squeezed and squeezed. I blew all the breath I could out of my lungs and crowded till I was black in the face. Nothing doing.

"I held out my hand toward Bill and called for him to help me pull through He was already twenty feet in the lead, and he walked slowly back to where I was puffing, preparatory to making a fresh trial.

"Just as he stretched out his hand to take mine there was a sort of sickly smile spread over Bill's countenance, and he put both hands in his pockets, and I knew what he was going to say before he spoke.

"'I think, on second consideration,' he drawled, 'that I'll let you get out the best way that you can.'

"He threw me the candles he was carrying, with the exception of the one he would need to light himself to the entrance.

"When I saw that he meant to take advantage of my misfortune, maybe you think I didn't open up on him and give him a piece of my mind. Funny how you'll know a man half a lifetime, and trust him and respect him, and then right at an unexpected moment he'll turn out to be yellow all the way through, isn't it?"

I nodded an agreement.

"Well, my talk didn't faze Bill, of course. I didn't hardly expect it to.

"'All's fair in love and war,' he said. 'I'll tell Mary that you got so much poorer a specimen than I that you didn't care to come at all, and then it'll be us to the parsonage. You'll be all right in an hour or so,' he said in parting, and he even had the audacity to quote the words that I had used to him a few minutes before and say: 'There isn't but one fellow living that I'd rather see win her hand than you.'

"I pawed at the sides of that old drift something scandalous for the next five minutes. But it wasn't any use. I strained and tugged, but all I succeeded in doing was tearing a lot of buttons off my clothes and getting myself dirtier than I was before.

"It took me a full hour and a half to accomplish the exit of that mine. When I did get out I headed for home the shortest way, which took me down the main street of the town, but when I got in sight of the Methodist parsonage I changed my route. There was a crowd coming down the steps, and Bill and Mary were in the lead, and the rest of the crowd was throwing rice and old shoes.

"I turned down a back alley. I didn't feel like congratulating them just then; in fact, I never did feel like congratulating them."

"And so you're sure you've had all the dried apples you care for today?" asked the Boomer fireman, in closing.

"Yes," I said.

"And I can have these in the cup to do as I like with?"

"Sure thing," I said.

He took the remnant of the stewed dried apples and threw them over the side of the cab and into the river a couple of hundred feet below.

"They were never meant for human beings to eat," he said.

* * *

Hearts and Darts.

This is the returning festival of the venerable Bishop Valentine, as berhymed by poets and beloved of lovers in these wireless telegraph days, as it was in Merrie England of old, when, as Charles Lamb records, "the weary and all for-spent twopenny postman sank beneath a load of delicate embarrassment not his own."

What manner of person was this saint of eternal youth, whose name so brightly burns and glows in the rubric? The Church Calendar assigns him to the distant date of 270 A. D., but gives no particulars. We do know, however, that through all these intervening centuries Saint Valentine's name has typified "that universal sweet unrest which impels poor humans to seek perfection in union." Also, that hearts and Hymen's darts, and rhymed madrigals, in which the sender's name must be read between the lines, have been from time immemorial associated with the date of February 14, the good Bishop's birthday. The more chivalrous and devout men have been, the more ardent their observance of the sentimental anniversary.

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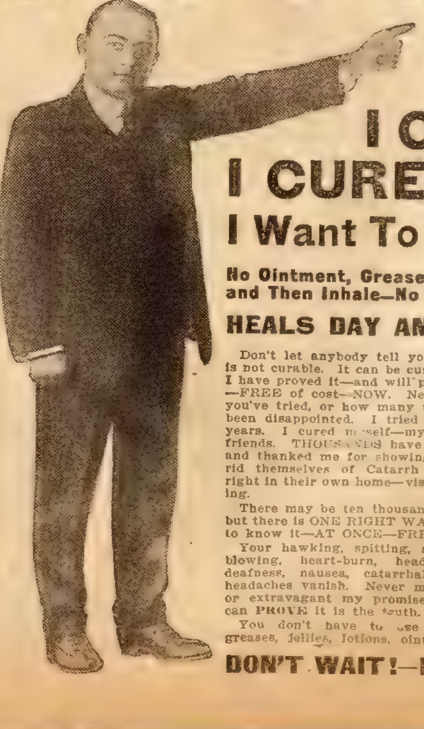

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There may be ten thousand wrong ways, but there is ONE RIGHT WAY. I want you to know it—AT ONCE—FREE.

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Now that I am so willing to show you how to drive out Catarrh, you certainly ought to write and let me aid you.

Nobody suffered more than I did. I was a social outcast—a miserable failure, and because I freed myself I want to free you. The truth is FREE. It is better by far than a gift of money to you. It means Health, Happiness, **Freedom from Catarrh**—that fearful demon of disease.

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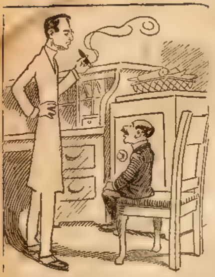


Lawyer—"I'll take hold of your case for $50!"
Client—"And how much to let go?"

Changing Daniel Around.

A clergyman, recently engaged with another of a different belief in a controversy regarding some question of religion, sent to a newspaper office a long article supporting his side of the question. The manuscript had been set up in type for the next day's issue. About midnight the telephone bell rang furiously, and the minister at the other end asked for the editor

"I am sorry to trouble you at such a late hour," he said, "but I am in great trouble."

"What can I do for you?" the editor asked.

"In the article I sent you today I put Daniel in the fiery furnace. Please take him out and put him in the lion's den."

Too Much for Teacher.

"I ate a worm," said the little tot in the kindergarten.

The teacher, thinking that perhaps the child had really done such a thing, protested warmly over the undesirability of the proceeding. "Why, just think," she said, as a final argument, "how badly the mamma worm felt to have her little baby eaten up."

"I ate she's mamma, too," was the triumphant rejoinder that proved too much for the teacher.

Very Fortunate.

"The wolves were upon us," he related to the girl he was trying to impress. "Their howling penetrated to our very marrow. We fled for our lives. But each second we knew that the ravenous pack was gaining on us. Closer, closer—at last they were so close that we could feel their muzzles against our legs so that——"

"Ah," sighed the lady, greatly relieved. "How glad you must have been that they had their muzzles on!"

Seeing and Believing.

"Do you believe in ghosts?"

"No, suh," replied Mr. Erastus Pinkley. "I takes special care not to believe in 'em, 'cause I understands dat seein' is believin' an' I doesn' want to see none."

Shy.

"The bride was very shy."

"Very. She was even shy ten years when it came to giving her age."

Greater Than King.

Mrs. De Timid (at Long Beach Hotel)—"I beg pardon, but did you not say you were presented to the King during your tour abroad?"

Her Neighbor—"Yes, madam."

"And you spoke of other experiences of a like nature?"

"I was presented to several of the crowned heads of Europe, talked with many of the great Generals and noted diplomats and was granted an audience with the Pope."

"Weren't you scared?"

"Not at all"

"Then, if you are not afraid, I wish you would tell the head waiter that this salt box is empty

A Sure Test.

The seventh grade was having final examinations in cooking. One of the questions was, "How would you tell the difference between a spring chicken, a chicken and an old fowl."

"By the teeth," Eleanor replied.

"Oh, but you know chickens haven't any teeth, Eleanor," said the teacher.

"I know that," Eleanor retorted, "but the people who eat them have."

Telling the Truth.

"Here's a letter from some city folks answerin' our ad, Mirandy. They want ter know if there's a bath in the house What'll I tell 'em?"

"Tell 'em the truth," said the wife. "Tell 'em if they need a bath they'd better take it afore they come."

Husband—"How conceited you are, Effie! You're always looking at yourself in the glass"

Wife—"I'm sure I am not. I don't think I'm half as pretty as I really am."

Curtain, Please.

They had broken a wishbone together
"What was it you wished?" laughed she.
"I wished that you'd let me kiss you.
Now tell me your wish," said he.

Her eyes fell—she paused a moment,
While her blushes deeper grew
"My wish was," she prettily stammered,
"That what you wished would come
true."

The Lesser Evil.

Mr. Callahan had received a long tongue lashing from Mr. Hennessey in a Third avenue saloon, and his friends were urging on him the wisdom of vindicating his honor with his fists.

"But he's more than me equal," said Mr Callahan, dubiously, "and look at th size of 'im!"

"Sure, an' you don't want folks to be sayin' Terry Callahan is a coward?'" demanded a reproachful friend

"Well, I dunno," and Mr. Callahan gazed mournfully about him. "I'd rather that than to 'ave 'em sayin' day after ter-morrow, 'How natural Terry looks!'"

Not a Detector.

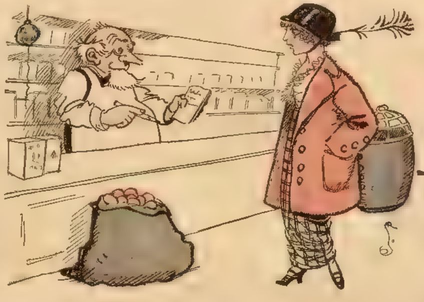
Husband—"Mary, it seems that every time you get a bill changed you get a piece of bad money shoved on you."

Wife—"Maybe so, Henry; but I handle so little I don't know the difference."—Judge.

A Flirt.

A confirmed old bachelor once defined a flirt in a scorching epigram that is still remembered

"A flirt," he said, "is a rose from which everybody takes a petal; the thorns remain for the future husband."



Grocer—"Why do you ask for a peck of little potatoes?"
Mrs. Yungwife—"You know, Artie and I have little appetites"

Obstructing the View.

Willie and his little sister were visiting at a mountain resort where they heard a great deal of talk of the fine view. One day the sister fell over the edge of the piazza, and Willie ran screaming to his mother:

"Oh, mamma! Come quick! Bessie has fallen into the view!"

Missed Nothing.

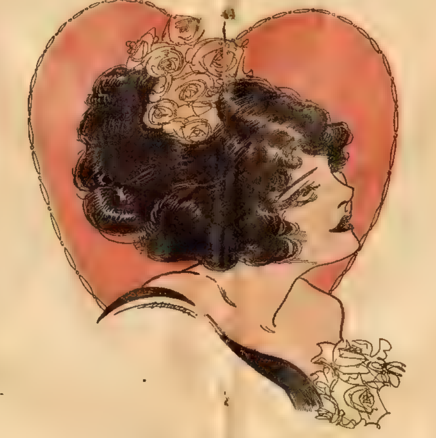
He and she arrived in the fifth inning

He (to a fan)—"What's the score?"

Fan—"Nothing to nothing"

She—"Goody! We haven't missed a thing!"

WHY NOT?



"Love, send me no sweet valentine.
I care not for the silly thing.
If it's thy wish to call me thine,
Why not produce a wedding ring?"

Can Prove It.

An Evanston woman has made a wonderful invention and she hasn't protected it by patent or copyright, so it is now available for everybody. Listen to it:

A friend of hers was calling the other day and she said:

"How do you know when your husband forgets to mail the letters you gave him in the morning?"

"Oh, that's easy. I always put a card addressed to myself in the bunch. If I don't receive that card on the next day I know that he has been delinquent. And I can prove it on him. And it only costs one cent!"

Would Make Better Anarchists.

"It's perfectly disgraceful!" she exclaimed

"What's the matter?" inquired her husband

"Here's a description of a woman who gets up in public and declares herself an anarchist."

"Well," was the rejoinder, "maybe it's all for the best. I believe I'd like to see women crowd the males out of the anarchist business. When they threw bombs they wouldn't be so likely to hit anybody."

To the Limit.

Jones—"If Mr. Oldboy makes any such assertion I will denounce him as a liar."

President—"Mr. Jones, I call you to order. Our by-laws do not allow you to go that far."

Jones—"Then I call Mr. Oldboy a liar as far as it is permitted by the by-laws of this association."

New Reason.

Little Ethel—"Mamma, I know why it isn't safe to count your chickens before they're hatched."

Mother—"Why, dear?"

Little Ethel—"Coz sum of em might be ducks."

The Doctor Should Know.

A physician was summoned to a sick man, but was much preoccupied with troubles of his own. On arriving at the sick man's bed, he said to his wife:

"Your husband is in the last throes. Every movement shows that the end is nearing." At this moment the sick man's head fell over the pillow, when the doctor said: "The end has come, your husband is dead"

In a shrill, thin voice the sick man said

"'Tain't so, Maria."

At once the wife laid her hand on his head and remarked: "Don't disturb yourself, Rufus—the doctor knows best."

Everything Depends.

Tommy—"May I stay up a little longer?"

Ethel—"What do you want to stay up for?"

Tommy—"I want to see you and Mr. Green playing cards."

Mr Green—"But we are not going to play cards."

Tommy—"Oh, yes, you are, for I heard mamma saying to Ethel that everything depended on the way she played her cards tonight."

Needed to Steady Himself.

Samuel Untermyer, the New York lawyer, said in Washington of a certain exposure:

"The proof was positive—as positive as the proof against the barber

"There was a barber who was accused of secret inebriety, but his old patrons refused to credit such a charge

"A stanch old patron went to the man to be shaved one morning. The barber in silence began to lather him, and then suddenly seized him by the nose.

"Lathering away, the barber gripped the nose so firmly that its owner grunted in pain.

"'Here, let go my nose'"

"But the barber, still holding on tight, said as he lathered steadily on

"'Can't! If I did I'd fall down.'"

Just Like a Husband.

"My husband is one of the most stubborn men in the world"

"He can't be any more stubborn than mine."

"Oh, yes, I'm sure he must be. Yesterday I had an engagement to meet him at three o'clock"

"Yes?"

"Well, it was nearly $4:30 when I got there, and he won't admit yet that the rest he got while he was waiting did him any good.

Hopeless.

Adorer—"Won't you try and love me?"

Boston Girl—"I fear that I could never love a man who says 'try and' instead of 'try to.'"

Not Quite Blind.

Love may be blind. But you never saw a bride who couldn't tell orange blossoms from sunflowers.

The Polite Husband.

A husband was being arraigned in court in a suit brought by his wife for cruelty

"I understand, sir," said the judge, addressing the husband, "that one of the indignities you have showered upon your wife is that you have not spoken to her for three years. Is that so?"

"It is, your honor," quickly answered the husband

"Well, sir," thundered the judge, "why didn't you speak to her, may I ask?"

"Simply," replied the husband, "because I didn't want to interrupt her"

Not a Good Shot.

A keen-eyed mountaineer led his overgrown son into a country schoolhouse.

"This here boy's arter larnin'," he announced. "What's yer bill o' fare?

"Our curriculum, sir," corrected the schoolmaster, "embraces geography, physiology, arithmetic, algebra, trigonometry——"

"That'll do" interrupted the father "That'll do. Load him up heavy with trigernometry. He's the only poor shot in the family"

An Old, Old Story.

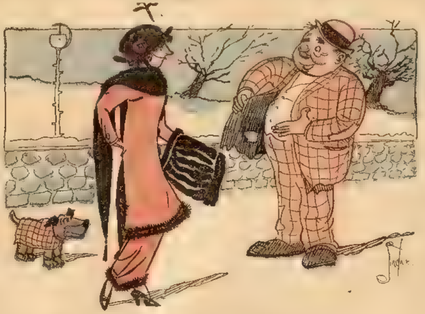
Adam (in the suburbs of the Garden of Eden)—"Now, Eve, you surely aren't going to clamor for clothes already"

Eve (tearfully)—"You know very well Adam, I haven't had a decent thing since the fall!"—Judge.

Ear for Music.

"What is that tune your daughter is playing?"

"Which daughter?" asked Mrs. Cumrox. "If it is the older girl it's Liszt's Hungarian Rhapsody and if it's the younger one it's Exercise 27."



The Lady—"How can you prove that the purse I found is yours?"
The Hobo—"Why, just look, madam, at the hole in my pocket!"

His Occupation.

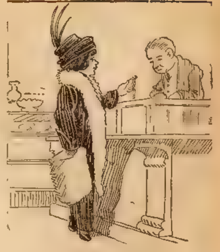
"I know a man who can supply affinities at short notice."

"Who is he?"

"My shoemaker. He makes a business of giving sole mates."

An Awful Waste.

Sir Archibald Geikie tells a story of a Scotchman who, much against his own will, was persuaded to take a holiday He went to Egypt and visited the pyramids. After gazing for some time at the great pyramid he muttered: "Man, what a lot of mason work not to be bringin' in any rent!"



Customer—"I want a hair spring for this watch"

New Clerk—"Is it a blonde or brunette?"

Not Quite Full.

The late George B. Cluett, collar manufacturer and philanthropist, believed profoundly in temperance.

Mr. Cluett, at a temperance dinner in New York, once said:

"In moonshine districts, where the whisky looks like water and is drunk like water, strange ideas prevail as to what intoxication really is.

"In a moonshine village one Saturday afternoon, a man lay in the broiling sun in the middle of the road with an empty bottle by his side.

"'He's drunk: lock him up,' the sheriff said.

"But a woman interposed hastily

"'No, he hain't drunk,' she said. 'I jest seen his fingers move.'"

Looked Too Often.

Angry Purchaser—"Didn't you tell me that you had got as many as twelve eggs in one day from those eight hens you sold me?"

Poultry Raiser—"Yes, ma'am."

Angry Purchaser—"Then why is it that I'm never able to get more than two eggs from them and sometimes not so many in one day?"

Poultry Raiser—"I don't know, ma'am, unless it's because you look for eggs too often. Now, if you look for them only once a week I feel quite positive that you will get just as many eggs in one day as I did."

Nothing in Prophecy.

George Harvey, who so accurately prophesied the election of President Wilson, said at a luncheon in New York:

"But it doesn't pay to be a prophet. If you prophesy right, nobody ever remembers it. If you prophesy wrong nobody ever forgets it."

She Didn't Notice Them.

A doctor attended an old lady from Scotland who had caught a severe cold.

"Did your teeth chatter when you felt the chill coming over you?" asked the doctor

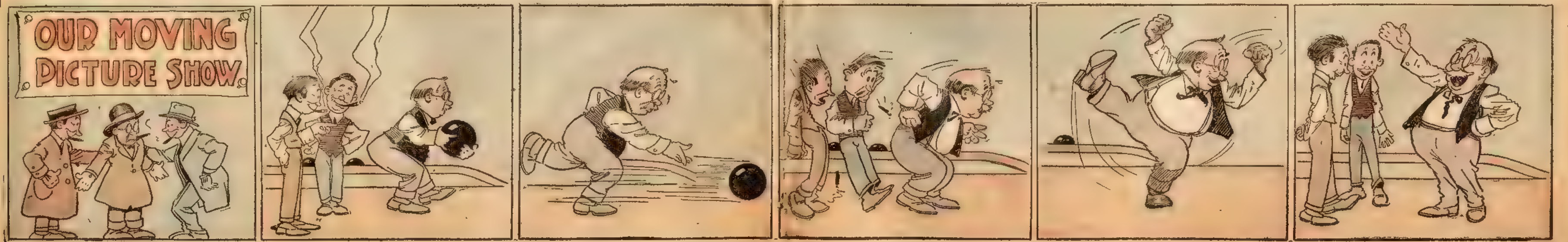
"I dinna ken, doctor; they were lying on the table!" was the pleasant reply.

Availability in Prospect.

I fear I am not worthy of you."

"Never mind about that. Between mother and myself I imagine we can effect the necessary improvements

A STRANGE ACCIDENT



The Boys—"Come on Pop, you're always telling what a great bowler you used to be. Now, you gotta show us"
Pop—"But I haven't rolled a game in twenty years!"

Pop—"Oh, well, I'll try it, but I don't expect much with such poor balls, and a punk alley, and such bum lights."
The Boys—"Tee hee! hear his excuses!"

Pop—"Well, here goes! If I miss you'll know it's all the fault of these rotten balls; everything's crooked——

"Stick to 'er, dern ye! Go it! y'r on a bee line——

"Whoopee! A strike! A strike!

"Well, now kids, what did I tell ye! Some class to y'r old Dad, eh! What?"
The Boys—"Dad you're a wonder—for accidents."

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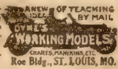

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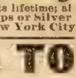

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The Cabalistic Hand

Or, TELLTALE FINGERPRINTS

By George Ethelbert Walsh

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE mystery of the fer-de-lance could not, after all, be traced very far, for while Philip Fraser at first showed a decided disinclination to talk about the serpent—which by the way was a sore point with him on account of the newspaper notoriety given to the little story of his threatened suicide a la Cleopatra—he eventually made a clean breast of it. He had kept the serpent in a small cage in his bachelor apartments, intending to dispose of it later by presenting it to a friend greatly interested in snakes, but one night the poisonous creature had vanished.

He could not explain the mystery of its disappearance. Fearful lest the serpent had escaped and was lodging somewhere in his rooms, he had temporarily moved away while carpenters and mechanics had made a thorough search for the venomous creature, tearing up the boards and plumbing and uncovering every possible hiding-place. But the fer-de-lance could not be found, and after a reasonable length of time he abandoned the search and tried to forget the occurrence.

The thought of its having been stolen had never occurred to him until Maxine suggested it. Who would want to steal such a poisonous reptile? It would be sure death to be bitten by the creature, and only an expert could possibly take him out of his cage and carry him away.

Nevertheless, such a thing was possible if one was interested enough in poisonous snakes to attempt the deed. Maxine showed him how one could easily, with a forked stick, capture the most venomous serpent and pick him up without danger.

"You had no servants or visitors who might want to own such a serpent?" Maxine asked.

"Why, no," he replied. "That is——"

"You are quite sure?" interrogated Maxine, suavely.

"I was thinking of a big Japanese chap, who one day visited me to see some of my curios from the Orient," he answered slowly. "I had decided to sell some of them, and Meteso was sent to me to examine them."

"Who sent him to you?"

"A friend of mine who had helped the old chap in some misfortune or another."

"Go on please," Maxine said, as he stopped.

"Well, I don't know much about Meteso—except that he's about the ugliest-looking chap I ever laid eyes on. He's pockmarked, yellow, with a hideous scar on his left cheek, and a bald head; but he was of giant stature—that is, for a Jap. Perhaps he wouldn't be considered a giant in this country. I often thought he'd make a pretty tough customer to fight with."

"He visited your apartments several times?"

"No, only once. He examined the curios, and seemed wonderfully smart and intelligent. He sorted them out and labeled many that I did not understand. He even set a value on them. He was quite well read, and knew a lot about the history of his country and its products."

"All Japs do. They're the most patriotic nation on the globe. But about the fer-de-lance?"

"He saw the serpent and seemed strangely fascinated by it. I explained where I got it and told him how venomous the creature was. Instead of frightening him this information increased his interest; he seemed almost fascinated, and kept looking toward the cage repeatedly. He even seemed to speak to it in a low guttural voice, and when the snake heard him it would cease its hissing and squirming. I verily believe he was a snake charmer."

"Quite possible; that's one of the many accomplishments of the educated Japs. Then what happened?"

"Nothing, sir. He left me, but not without a last backward glance at the snake and a peculiar call that might have been a pet name he had bestowed upon the snake."

"And he never returned?"

"No, sir, not unless he came by night and stole the fer-de-lance. I should never have thought of it if you hadn't suggested some such thing. Perhaps he did steal it from the cage."

"Do you know where Meteso lives?"

"No, sir; haven't the faintest idea. He did keep a little shop on the avenue, but he's not there any more. I suppose the police might locate him."

"Perhaps, but that isn't necessary. I can find Meteso."

If there is any one in the city who can hide from Maxine for any length of time, he must possess uncanny powers of making himself invisible. Not even the police dragnet can comb the underworld more thoroughly than Maxine when he sets out to unearth a criminal whose facial and other characteristics are known. With a fairly accurate description of Meteso from Mr. Fraser, he looked upon the discovery of the hiding-place of the big Jap merely as a question of time.

"Meteso may be innocent of any wrong, Montague," he reflected, "but we must round him up before we do anything more. If he stole the fer-de-lance from Fraser's apartments, he must explain what became of the reptile. In that way we can get an inside track of our enemy."

"Perhaps Meteso is the man we're looking for," I suggested. "These Japs are sometimes cunning and ingenious, and didn't Inspector McGonigle say that one of the rumors was that the head of the white slave organization was either a Chinaman or Jap?"

"So he did, Montague," Maxine replied, rubbing his hands gently. "Perhaps he may be the one."

"Then," I added, "he may prove a tough customer when we find him. Besides, he won't prove so easy to trace."

"No, but we have something visible and tangible to work on now. Before we were all in the dark. Now we know what our man looks like. We must find Meteso, and, finding him, get his fingerprints and measurements. Montague, let me have the reconstructed hand we made."

It was early in the evening, and when I brought out the drawing of the hand, with the fingerprints obtained from the different queer sources, Maxine turned on a blaze of electric light and began a close study and measurement of them. He seemed never to tire of this. He gloated over the prominent lines and curves, and made new comments on what they indicated; but always it led to the same conclusion.

"He's a master genius, Montague, a veritable master of details and scheming. He's a prize worth capturing."

I had heard this flattering comment so often that his words did not arouse any particular enthusiasm in me. I was fully conscious of the man's resourcefulness in crime; I had had abundant testimony to that, and did not care for any more.

For an hour Maxine sat there thinking and dreaming, alternately studying the hand chart before him and smoking in peace and quietness. Occasionally he would break the silence by rising to consult some book or diagram from the cabinet, or he would throw himself on the lounge and stare reflectively at the ceiling. In such moments of intense mental absorption Maxine was as far away as if a thousand miles separated our bodies.

The evening wore away slowly; once or twice a slight noise outside attracted my attention, but Maxine was too abstracted to take notice of such commonplace sounds. Sometimes it was a footfall or the scratching of a tree branch against the side of the house. They were for the most part noises that ordinarily would not have attracted my attention; but the uncanny thought that some invisible eyes were constantly watching and an unknown presence hovering over us for some diabolical purpose had given a queer twist to my mind. I was constantly expecting something to happen, and every unnatural sound startled me and caused me to turn around in alarm.

Maxine's nerves on the contrary were proof against any such weakness. The events of the past week apparently had not alarmed him; he was, I think, eagerly looking for the next demonstration of our enemy. To him the game was intensely fascinating, and each play of his enemy brought keen pleasure and satisfaction. The fact that it might mean danger to him was only a minor factor.

"Montague," he said suddenly, without raising his eyes from his desk, "I want you to be prepared for an emergency."

I looked up from the pages of a book I had been trying to read.

"Go on and pretend to read your book," he said quietly, "and do not be startled by anything I say."

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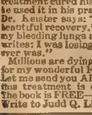

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It was difficult to obey this injunction without asking questions or glancing at him, but long habit had disciplined me to follow directions, and my eyes once more sought the white page before me.

"That's better," Maxine added, after a pause. "Now don't jump or move, but continue to read your book."

A moment later, after assuring himself that I was holding myself under control, he added:

"There's some-one at the window back of us. He's trying to look in."

Naturally under the circumstances I experienced a very strong inclination to jerk my head around and look; but Maxine's voice whispered softly:

"Steady now!"

I made a pretty good attempt to resume my reading, and Maxine continued to study his charts and diagrams. I cleared my throat and moistened my lips

"How do you know some one is at the window?" I asked, in a low whisper.

"You shouldn't ask me to answer such a question, Montague," was the subdued answer. "Why, do you suppose I had all these little mirrors placed in the room?"

I started a little and nearly forgot his warning. I remembered suddenly the ingenious mirror contrivance that Maxine had designed for the office. A score or more of these mirrors were distributed around in inconspicuous places so that, at no matter what angle we were looking, a complete reflection of nearly every part of the room was visible to us. They had been arranged with infinite care, and it used to be Maxine's boast that, with his eyes on the ceiling, floor, or straight ahead of him, he could watch everything going on in any part of the office. He could feign sleep, with his half-closed eyes turned toward the wall, and still watch the door, window, or other part of the room.

The mirrors were distributed not only with respect to their reflection of things going on in all parts of the room, but with the double purpose of disarming any suspicion of those entering or peering in. They were almost invisible; occupying inconspicuous places in the room, and often being half hidden from view by furniture, pictures or draperies. No one for an instant would imagine that the room had nearly two dozen large and small mirrors.

"Now if you will look directly over the top of your page," Maxine continued, after an interval, "and still pretend to be reading, you can see for yourself. Look directly at the little mirror at the foot of the fireplace. That's in the line of your book."

Slowly I raised my eyes a trifle and stared over the top of the page before me. At first I saw nothing but a confusion of sights, but gradually I made out the window. It was a very high one, with a projecting sill. I could see the pot containing the fake Cassiopeia plant standing on the wide sill where Maxine had placed it. But nothing else was visible in the picture reflected to me

"He's trying to look in, Montague," Maxine said slowly, continuing his apparent study of his papers. "I got a glimpse of a part of his face once, but he drew it back hastily. We mustn't alarm him. There it comes again!"

Slowly something appeared out of the darkness; it was outlined against the window-pane at first very indistinctly and then more clearly. I nearly forgot myself and repressed an exclamation with difficulty.

It was a hand—an outstretched palm, with the fingers spread out as if to display every contour of them. It was such a hand as one long remembers—pudgy, muscular, and deeply indented with creases and lines, and the fingers were long and sinewy. Once more Maxine cautioned me.

"The hand, Montague!" he whispered "But for Heaven's sake don't move or breathe! We must get a glimpse of his face"

The fact that our unknown enemy was so near to us, with perhaps some diabolical purpose in mind, caused me to tremble in spite of all my efforts at self-control, and at the same time the perspiration broke out on my forehead and dropped in a few tiny splashes on the book. But I did not move or change my position. I stared hard at the mirror at the foot of the fireplace and tried to appear unconcerned.

The strange hand rested a moment against the window-pane, as if the owner wished to give us the opportunity to study it, and then it closed and opened spasmodically. To me the hand seemed to grow in size and was ready to reach forth and grasp us. Once more Maxine cautioned

"Steady now, Montague! The face! We want to see the face!"

Would the man show his face? Or were we to be given only a vision of the extended palm? I saw by the tense face of Maxine, even without turning my eyes from the mirror, that the same question was worrying him. For one glimpse of the face he would risk all—give all!

The hand against the window moved slowly back; we breathed heavily, and Maxine was ready to spring up if it disappeared for good. He was on the point, I believe, of taking some such summary action, when once more the hand came back into the clear light of the room. This time it seemed as if it was being used to shade the eyes of the face behind it.

We watched intently, every nerve on tension, and eyes straining to bring the picture closer. The full outline of the hand was once more visible; then slowly, cautiously a face was revealed, coming gradually into the reflected light of the room until we could see every lineament of it. Pressed against the window-pane for a brief moment, we could take in every detail of the repulsive features.

It was truly a horrible, forbidding, almost uncanny, face—pockmarked, yellow, scarred, and disfigured. A slouch hat was drawn down over the bald pate, and from under its brim we could see a pair of pale, shifty, malignant eyes that now seemed to roam about the room and take in everything at a glance. If the hand had startled us, this forbidding face caused both of us to experience a sense of repulsion.

So this was our unknown enemy, the master criminal, the man who had defied Maxine and baffled him at every turn; this was the creature who by his genius could upset all the traditions of law and order and bring back the chaos of barbarism—the embodied personality of all that was cruel, crafty and devilish!

Perhaps my own imagination had something to do with my impressions of the face, for to me it seemed inexpressibly cruel and repulsive. I was so fascinated by it that I could only gaze in fear and horror, and if my life had depended upon it, I doubt if I could have moved or called for help. It was a species of hypnotism that held me in complete domination. I must have moved and indicated a strong desire to shout out or turn around, for once more at the critical moment Maxine's voice sounded warningly in my ears.

"Steady, Montague—steady!"

His voice broke the spell which had fallen over my mind, and instantly I pulled myself together. I could watch and study the face thereafter free from all prejudice. It was still pressed against the pane of glass, and the eyes were roaming wildly about the room—small slant eyes, but with a yellowish gleam in them. I was able to make out the nationality of the man; he was undoubtedly an Oriental—Chinaman or Jap. I thought immediately of Mr. Fraser's description of Meteso, and in a low whisper I said:

"It's Meteso, Maxine!"

"Yes," was the short reply. "It's Meteso."

CHAPTER XIX.

MAXINE was silent and watchful, giving the man at the window every opportunity to show himself and indicate by his actions the purpose of his visit; but if any one doubted Maxine's readiness for a quick surprise, they should have noted the tense, drawn muscles of face and hands and the alert eyes fixed so steadily on the tiny mirror before him. No animal prepared for a spring upon a foe could have been more ready for a lightning-like stroke But he waited patiently and silently, apparently a passive figure, diligently studying his charts, and to all appearances completely unaware of any danger from behind.

It was Maxine's plan to let the enemy go as far as he would, so that his motives could be betrayed, and then at the critical moment to act. The purpose of the man at the window was still conjectural; we could not guess his intentions, but we were prepared for any sudden move. If the hand had clutched a weapon we might easily have forestalled him; but it was empty, and only clutched at the glass as if it would wrench it from its frame. Once it did move up and down the pane, as if figuring a way to remove it without noise. This motion suddenly caused Maxine to move slightly.

"Montague," he whispered, "he's cutting the glass."

I could scarcely believe this, so silently had the diamond the man held in his hand worked, but a moment later I saw the glass shiver, and with some sticky substance attached to his palm the intruder quietly lifted the pane and removed it from the sash. It was a noiseless job and skilfully performed. A glow of admiration at such work almost made me forget my position. Through the aperture thus made a long, dark, hairy arm was next thrust, moving cautiously at first inch by inch, and then more quickly. Perhaps the operation would have been successful had not a gust of wind blew through the open space and rattled the shade. The noise created by this was so sharp and distinct that it was folly to feign ignorance of it. That would have carried our acting too far.

Maxine was conscious of this, too, but he frowned as he raised his head. He did not want to disturb the man at the window until his purpose was clear. But the inopportune wind brought about a quick climax. Realizing that in another moment his presence at the window would be detected, the owner of the hand first withdrew it hastily, and then thrust it back and made a grab for the potted plant standing on the window-sill. It was a long, hairy arm exposed to view, and the muscles of it were firm and knotted.

Careless of noise and all consequences of exposure, the hand grasped the plant and jerked it from its position. The pot caught in the window-frame, and another vicious jerk of it smashed the

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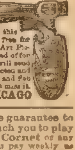

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glass and caused it to fall to the floor with a crash.

Maxine had turned and made a dash for the window. He could have shot the man easily, but he preferred to capture that long sinewy hand thrust through the window. In this he miscalculated his distance, and when he reached the sill both the face and hand had disappeared.

But Maxine was not to be balked so easily. Throwing over his shoulder a warning to me, he leaped through the window, carrying the sash with him. There was a loud clatter of snapping glass outside, and the two disappeared in the darkness.

I do not pretend to be as quick and agile as Maxine, nor as reckless. One glance at the jagged edges of the sash showed me that I could not jump through the window without risking severe injuries, and, besides, there was a drop on the other side of perhaps ten feet, and at the bottom a paved court of unyielding stone. I hesitated but an instant, and then turned and dashed out of the door to make my way around into the court.

It was the work of only a few seconds; indeed, I calculated that it took me no more than ten seconds to reach the court under the window; but quick as I was in getting there, I was too late. All was quiet and still in the court, and save for the cracking of the pieces of glass I trod on, there was nothing to indicate that anything unusual had happened.

Maxine and the intruder were gone. In vain I peered about the court, poking in corners and calling in loud whispers. There was no response to my words, and no signs of either.

The court was a small inclosed affair, with an entrance on one side, leading into a back yard, and thither I made my way cautiously. The two must have escaped in that direction, and once it seemed as if the sound of a scuffle ahead in the yard reached my ears. I hurried forward, but when I stumbled out of the court into the back yard there was nothing unusual to see or hear.

There were only two methods of escape from the yard. One was through the basement of the building, and the other over a high stone wall into a yard beyond. I tried the basement door and found it securely locked and bolted on the inside. The fleeing man had not escaped that way, for there would have been no time to lock the door after him.

The wall was nearly ten feet high. I tried to jump up and catch the top with my hands, but failed after repeated attempts. There was no ladder in the yard, but in one corner was a strong wistaria plant, with stems as thick as one's wrist. An examination of this showed that it had been roughly used, for many of the flowers and branches had been violently stripped off recently. I caught hold of the wistaria trunk and pulled myself up to the top of the wall.

From this position I could look into the yard beyond, and at another stone wall inclosing that on the far side; but all was calm and peaceful, and I was once more puzzled. They could have dropped into this yard, or run along the stone wall into any one of a dozen back yards, or escaped into the avenue beyond.

The flight and pursuit had been so hasty that neither had stopped to consider consequences. They had left a trail behind them in a way that did not please me. The noise created by the breaking glass and their scuffling footsteps had brought a dozen heads at different windows, and realizing that I might be taken for a thief, I decided not to attempt to go further. I dropped back into my own yard and made my way around to the court, and from there through a basement window to the front. In retracting my footsteps, I realized that I was abandoning Maxine to his fate; but I knew that he would prefer this to rousing the neighborhood and causing a sensation.

Ordinarily, I should have felt no uneasiness, for Maxine was perfectly capable of taking care of himself in any close encounter, but the terrible nature of the man he was pursuing, and his wonderfully ingenious resources, caused me no little worry. Would Maxine find his match in a physical struggle as he had in a battle of brains? Would the unknown Meteso lure him to some obscure place, and then turn on him with the cunning of a wild animal? Was not the attempted theft of the fake plant from the office all a cleverly worked out trick to get Maxine in a trap where he could be killed? Perhaps half a dozen confederates of Meteso's would be concealed somewhere to make short work of the great detective.

These reflections gave me an unpleasant half-hour. I conned them over in my mind, and grew so nervous and restless in waiting that I had to return to the court and back yard several times to make more cautious surveys. The heads were gradually disappearing from the open windows, and the suspicion that had been inspired by the noise was quieting down.

But I gained little enlightenment by these trips. I could conjecture nothing, and there was no clew to show which way they had gone. I returned to the office each time, and tried to calm myself. If Maxine was uninjured, he would return as soon as possible. All I could do was to wait and watch with such approach to patience as I could command.

It was considerably over half an hour; my patience was tried almost to the limit, and my mind was busy conjuring up all sorts of terrible tragedies, when the door opened softly and Maxine walked in—pale, limping, and dirty, but otherwise calm and self-possessed. He smiled as I sprang eagerly forward to greet him.

"I'm all right, Montague," he said, waving me away from him.

He took a drink, brushed the dirt from his clothes, straightened his tie, and once more looked composed and well satisfied.

"You didn't catch him, Maxine?" I asked.

"Yes, Montague," he replied with a grim smile, "I caught him, but I didn't hold him long; he was slippery as an eel."

"Then he got away?"

"If he hadn't I wouldn't be here without him. Yes Montague, he escaped; he gave me the slip. I had hands on him twice, but he was like an eel. He wriggled out of his clothes and slipped away each time."

"He had no confederates with him?"

"No, he was alone. I admire him for that. It was a game battle between us, but he's wiry, muscular, and a cunning antagonist. I could have shot him once, but I wouldn't do that. He never offered to use weapons—and it wasn't in me to take advantage of him."

"But he's threatened our lives with all sorts of diabolical weapons," I replied hotly. "I should have shot him."

"Perhaps I was entitled to, Montague, but it seemed a little against the rules of fair play. If he had turned on me with a knife or dagger, I should have winged him without compunction. But it seemed a fair challenge for fists and bare hands, and I had to meet him on his own ground."

I felt a wave of reasonable disgust rising in me at this announcement. After all the dangerous tricks Meteso had played on us, it seemed folly to permit him to escape when he was once within our grasp.

"I can't agree with you Maxine," I replied. "That's carrying chivalry a bit too far. You should have captured him by any means at your hand; he's a menace to us and to society. It was your duty to wound him at least so you could hold him."

Maxine seemed to dismiss the subject from mind without further discussion, and seated himself in his favorite chair and lighted his pipe.

"What bothers me, Montague," he said reflectively, "is why he wanted to risk so much to steal that plant."

"It was a trick," I answered promptly. "He didn't want the plant at all."

"I don't know about that; he clung to it through thick and thin, and carried it away with him in spite of all my efforts to capture him."

"It was a trick," I added confidently, "to lure you outside. I believe he had a trap set for you, but it didn't work just right. His confederates failed him."

"No, I don't think he had confederates waiting for him. He was playing a lone hand, and that increases my admiration for him. But why did he want to steal that plant?"

"I don't know," I answered bluntly and honestly.

"There must have been some good reason for it. I wonder what it is."

For a period of ten minutes he lapsed into reflective silence, puffing slowly and automatically at his pipe.

"Montague," he said again, breaking the stillness, "I've a dim recollection of having seen Meteso before; but I don't recall just where. Can you enlighten me?"

I shook my head negatively.

"I recognized him," I replied, "only from the description given to us by Mr. Fraser. I'm sure I've never seen him before in the flesh."

"Curious how familiar something about him seems to me," reflected Maxine. "Moreover, he seemed to know me. Once he glanced back when I was pursuing him, and screamed, 'Let me have it! Let me have it! It's mine!' Of course, he referred to the plant; but I'm sure he recognized me. He was scared, too."

"Most criminals are scared of you Maxine," I said, with a smile, "and most of them know you. That's nothing unusual."

"Yes, but this fellow seemed to recognize me in a different way. I can't describe just how, but it was there in his eyes and face. And at the same time I was conscious of a queer sensation that I had met him before and had had dealings with him. I can't describe that feeling, either, in words. I simply felt it. You know sometimes how you feel a thing, Montague, and can't tell why or how."

"If you had met Meteso in the way you suggest, you would have no difficulty in recalling it. It must have been imagination caused by the excitement of the chase."

"Perhaps it was, Montague, but I'm not given usually to such hallucinations. However, I can't recall anything of the past that related to him."

"Well, now that you know him by looks it won't be so difficult to follow him up. We have something more than

(Continued on page twenty-five.)

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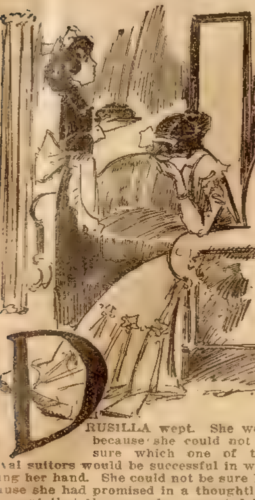
Drusilla's Strange Valentine



DRUSILLA wept. She wept because she could not be sure which one of two rival suitors would be successful in winning her hand. She could not be sure because she had promised in a thoughtless moment that the one who presented her with the most original valentine should be the lucky man. Now she reflected that while Original Oscar was there with the inventive ingenuity, Opulent Otis, his rival, had at his command the resources of an enormous fortune.

She was deeply troubled because she really wanted Original Oscar to make good and she feared that he would be vanquished. So she waited.

And while she waited she wept

Drusilla to distract her sad thoughts arose and looked out of the window. Glancing up the street, she observed a small, shining and perfectly appointed automobile delivery carriage. It came gently and swiftly on and stopped directly in front of Drusilla's father's mansion. Out stepped a slim, alert young man in a natty uniform. He had a fashion plate mustache and beneath its raven curve his smiling lips parted just enough to show his fine teeth. He came toward the side door.

Soon the maid touched Drusilla on the elbow and presented a small box to her on the golden tray. The heiress ceased weeping for the moment and began to hope that here was the expected valentine from Original Oscar.

She thought with a quick flash of encouragement that quality had the better Original Oscar would make good. She gazed hopefully out of the window once more. Soon she saw, this time on looking down the street, a heavy, dingy auto truck puffing slowly along. Her heart almost stopped beating at the thought. "What if that lurching, ugly vehicle should be bringing the valentine of Original Oscar?" Could he hope to outdo, or even to match, a creation that was at once a valuable gift, a valentine and—here Drusilla blushed and cast a glance over her shoulder—an engagement ring? And he a poor man, too?

Drusilla looked again at the huge auto truck. It was weather beaten, it toiled along making a noise like a sham battle in a tin shop, and it did not promise much. But it stopped in front of the house; then, crossing the street, it took a running start and whirled up the driveway to the porte cochere. Drusilla clasped her white hands to her palpitating bosom and hoped

Steps were heard upon the stair and in the hall outside the door of the sitting room of Drusilla's apartments. Four men—great, rough, unshaven fellows in work stained overalls—came in, bearing a box about eight feet square by two feet deep. They brought the box through the door on its edge, then laid it right side up in the middle of the room and removed the lid. Then they lifted out of the rough case a box made in the shape of a heart and decorated with cheap red cloth. This box was all of seven feet square. The men picked up the splintered piece of the rough case and went downstairs without a word. Without a word they cranked their wheezy old engine and departed noisily.

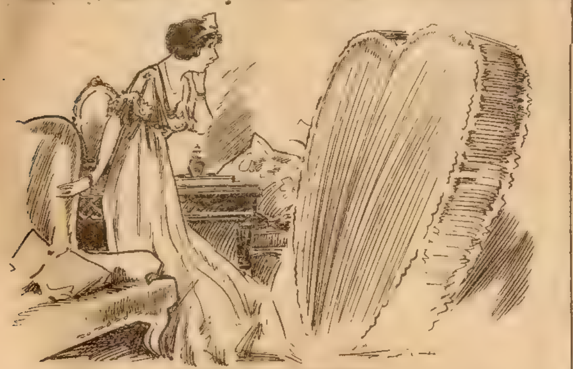
Drusilla stood enthralled before her new valentine. She wanted to open it, and she did not want to open it. What might it be? Then again, what might it not be? She, forgetful of her own sentiments of a while ago, consoled herself with the reflection that it was something very desirable if quantity counted for anything.

As she moved toward the new treasure she saw a corner of a piece of paper sticking out from under what must be the lid. She pulled at the paper ever so gently and the lid lifted. There, upon cushions skillfully constructed of hay and ticking, reposed Original Oscar and a strange man in a black suit!

"Why, why——" stammered Drusilla, taken aback.

"My love," cried Original Oscar, leaping from the box to clasp Drusilla in his arms; "my love! I want you to know my friend, my good friend, Dr. Splicemtight."

"Oh, o-oh!" breathed Drusilla, looking deep into the eyes of Original Oscar. "I'm so glad"—she paused just long enough to cast a knowing look at her beloved and then to turn and face the



Drusilla stood enthralled.

a quantity at any stage of the game. She believed in Oscar and she believed in his originality. Summoning her courage she opened the box.

Inside the little box Drusilla found a ring, a ring with one magnificent diamond, cut—oh, wonder of wonders!—in the exact shape of a heart. The ring reposed upon a bed of velvet strewn with golden Cupids. Even before she looked at the note tucked under the ring Drusilla realized with a feeling of despair that no poor man could afford even the box in which this gift had come. She sighed deeply.

The maid looked over her mistress' shoulder and could not restrain an "O-o-o-ee! How original!"

Drusilla rebuked the maid with a glance. The maid departed silently and apologetically on her toes.

Drusilla wept again.

But there was still a bare chance that doctor—"to meet you, Dr. Splicemtight!"

Drusilla extended her hand and saw that she still held the paper which she had pulled out when the lid lifted. She looked at it closely, and as she grasped its meaning she blushed until her lovely cheeks seemed as red as the velvet in the ring box from Opulent Otis, or as the cloth upon the large box on the floor.

She laid the marriage license on the table, smiled at Dr. Splicemtight, whispered "You win," to Original Oscar, and rang for her maid.

* * *

Broke a Contract.

If it were not for the children this woman would get a divorce. She has been deceived for ten years. That is the period of her married life.

The courtship leading up to that nuptial contract covered two years. In that time the man and the woman wrote many letters. The woman wrote 746 and the man 716. The day before the wedding the woman said:

"Henry, have you kept all my letters?"

"Every one of them," said Henry.

"How sweet of you," she murmured. "Now I'll tell you what we will do. I have made two sofa pillows, one for you and one for me. Instead of stuffing them with cotton or feathers or sweet balsam we will fill them with our old love letters and keep them for ever and ever. Won't that be lovely?"

Henry said it would be. So the woman gave him his pillow cover. It was very pretty, also it was appropriate.

It was made of green satin, embroidered in gold. It said, "From one I love." Her pillow also was an ornate confection.

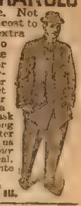
As soon as the woman and her husband went to housekeeping she placed the two pillows side by side on a sofa. When they began to get dusty she packed them away in scented tissue paper and put them in a dark closet. Once a week she took them out and patted them and said, "Dear Henry

One day last week the woman remembered a certain poetic effusion she had one time written to Henry. She wished to see just how she had worded it, so she opened the sofa pillow and looked for the letter.

It was not there. None of her letters were there. Instead of stuffing his pillow with her love epistles, Henry, the wretch, had used old bills and business letters and circulars because, as he shamelessly confessed, when taxed with his disloyalty, he didn't want to take chances on being made to feel like a fool by having "all that tommyrot brought up against him when he reached the age of gray hairs and discretion."

* * *

And many a raw deal is synonymous with a close shave.



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COPIES WEEKLY.

PEPPERS

GENTLE JABS

A good manager can be his own boss.

A conceited man is one who thinks he isn't.

Some men are too tender-hearted to beat a rug.

A man's deeds attract more attention than his creeds.

Hope is an excellent tonic, but it makes a poor diet.

Bachelor quarters may be exchanged for better halves.

A flirt is always on the go, but she never gets anywhere.

However, a good-natured friend is sometimes an enemy in disguise.

Few men reach 60 without wishing they had been more economical.

It is a toss up between a many-sided man and a two-faced woman.

It pays to be honest, but sometimes pay day is a long time showing up.

Probably a spinster remains a Miss because she was unable to make a hit.

Any fool woman can catch a husband, but it takes a clever one to hold him.

Fortunate is the man who can make his running expenses slow down to a walk.

There's more room for improvement than there is satisfactory building material.

Every time a man turns a corner on the road to success he bumps into a toll gate.

Many a man's cordial handshake is due to the fact that he needs that dollar in your pocket.

Shortly after marriage a man begins to realize that he talked too much during the courtship.

Often a man has a lot of good traits that you would never suspect if he didn't tell you about them.

Take a close look at the people you meet every day and rejoice that you were not born a cannibal.

When a small man finally makes up his mind to fight he begins to look around for a friend to hold him.

When a young man writes to a girl on a postal card, she may as well chloroform all hopes she has in his direction.

A soft-hearted man always gets the worst of it when he has occasion to transact business with a hard-headed one.

A genuine curiosity would be a man who keeps his mouth shut and lives to regret it. We have never seen a genuine curiosity.

Among the Cobwebs.

Bishop Candler of Atlanta, apropos of worldly parsons, said:

"There was a worldly parson of this type in Philadelphia, a great fox hunter, whom a Spruce street Quaker took in hand.

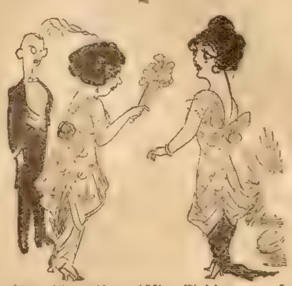
"'Friend,' said the Quaker, 'I understand thee's clever at fox catching.'

"'I have few equals and no superiors at that sport,' the parson complacently replied.

"'Nevertheless, friend,' said the Quaker, 'if I were a fox I would hide where thee would never find me.'

"'Where would you hide?' asked the parson, with a frown.

"'Friend,' said the Quaker, 'I would hide in thy study.'"



Miss Flatfeather—"Miss Pickles, may I present my brother?"

Miss Pickles—"Not to me. I wouldn't take him as a gift."

Saved Their Lives.

Reference being made at a recent banquet to the wonderful inventions of children to escape paternal punishment, one man present was reminded of little Jimmy and his new skates.

The skates, the narrator said, were given Jimmy at Christmas, but on account of the unsafe condition of the ice he was told not to attempt to try them. The pressure, however, soon became too great for the youngster, and hiding the skates in his coat one morning he hustled for the pond. A half hour later he returned dripping wet.

"Where in the world have you been?" exclaimed mother on catching sight of her saturated child. "Didn't I tell you not to try those skates until the ice was safe?"

"Don't whip me, mamma," exclaimed Jimmy. "I just saved three men and three women from drowning!"

"You don't mean it!" was the wondering response of mother.

"Yes," returned the youngster, "they were just about to go on the ice when I broke through."

The Healer.

Dr. F. F. Friedmann, at a luncheon in Providence showed an unexpected knowledge of English; he told, in fact, a dialect story.

"A physician from the South," he began, "said he was glad that my treatment was now better understood—that it was not looked on like a treatment of Dr. Mose.

"A white physician, meeting Dr. Mose, said:

"'Well, Mose, where have you been?'

"'Been to see Cal Clay,' Mose replied. 'He busted a bloodvessel wrestlin' with Wash White.'

"'Why, Mose, that's serious! What did you prescribe?' asked the white doctor.

"'I fixed him up all right with alum and gum arabic,' Mose answered. 'Alum to draw the pahts together, and the gum to stick 'em.'"

Great Bragging.

Dorothy, Delia, and Daisy, three youngsters of a New Jersey town, were discoursing about the baby brothers who had taken up their residence in the three families during the past year.

"My little brother Tom's got a lovely silver mug that Grandfather just sent him," said Dorothy. "It's a beauty; and he had a silver knife and fork from Grandma, too."

"My little brother Harry's got a beeyutiful carved rattle that Uncle Dick sent him from Japan," said Delia. "It's the prettiest rattle that ever was."

"My little brother Willie's not so big as your brothers," said Daisy, with an air of endeavoring to conceal a feeling of triumph, "but the doctor says he's had more spasms than any other baby in this whole neighborhood, so there!"

Absolutely Untrue.

"Woodrow Wilson naturally believes in a college education for boys and girls alike," said a banker at the Princeton Club in New York. "Mr. Wilson, lunching with me here, once said in his quaint way that the old idea about a college education unfitting a lad for work had quite died out.

"'We no longer hear,' he declared, 'stories like that of Gobsa Golde

"'When Gobsa Golde's son, Scattergood,' he explained, 'desired to go to Princeton he said to the old man:

"'"Pater, is it true that boys who go to college are unfit for work afterward?"

"'"Of course, it ain't true!" snorted the old man, indignantly. "Why, I've got a Princeton graduate runnin' my freight elevator, two of my best coal heavers are Harvard A. B.'s and a Yale B. S. is my star truck driver."'"

Time for Repairs.

One day a well-dressed elderly man called at the shop of the local jeweler in a small Scottish town and asked:

"Is my watch ready?"

As the watchmaker had at the moment no remembrance of the man, he asked him in turn:

"When did you leave your watch?"

"Oh" replied the man, "I didn't leave it in this shop. Ye were ower by Nelson street when ye got it."

"Nelson street?" repeated the jeweler. "We left Nelson street seventeen years ago."

"But I left it with ye, for a' that."

"Can you tell me the name and the number of the watch?"

They were promptly given, as well as a description of the watch, and it was found. Exactly twenty-two years had passed since it was left for repairs, yet at the end of that time its owner had called for it as naturally as if he had only left it the preceding week.

"Why have you not got your property before?" asked the jeweler.

"Weel," responded the man, "I went over to America shortly after. I kent the watch would be safe with ye till I cam back, but I stayed a wee thocht langer than I intended."

An Innocent Blunder.

Congressman Emmett Wilson of Florida tells a story demonstrating how innocently one may make a mighty bad break.

Some time ago the junior member of a prominent firm was married and the senior member, who had never seen the bride, went down to her papa's house to join the jubilee.

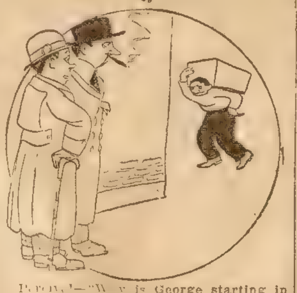
After the wedding came the reception, and then the senior partner stepped forward to offer his congratulations.

"Although this is our first meeting, Mrs. Jones," effusively remarked the senior partner, grasping the bride's hand, "I hardly feel like a stranger. In fact, I consider myself quite well acquainted.

"Oh, yes, indeed," happily replied the bride. "I suppose Harry has spoken to you about me quite often."

"He has, indeed," returned the senior partner, "and, what is more, time and time again he has read me certain pretty extracts from the letters of his dear little Marie."

"Really, I beg your pardon, sir," said the bride, with a sudden coldness. "My name is Gladys."



Parent—"Why is George starting in the hardware business?"

Artie—"He says he has an iron constitution to begin with."

Love.

In an informal chat on eugenics, Prof. Hiram Eliot Courtney said in Cleveland:

"Perhaps some day, we'll have marriages of different lengths—brief love marriages to terminate with the birth of a beautiful child, and life marriages, based on something more spiritual and more permanent than love.

"For love, despite the songs of the poets, is gross, and love, furthermore, resembles March."

"How does love resemble March, Professor?" a local reporter asked.

"Love resembles March," Dr. Courtney replied, "because it comes in like a lion and, thirty days later or thereabouts, it goes out like a lamb."

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The Signs in Red

(Continued from page three.)

longed to see a detective called in and set to work vigorously.

Before ten o'clock the house was dark, with the women supposedly in bed and a force of men guarding doors and windows. Borrowdale and I slipped quietly out, Borrowdale shook my hand and we separated, each to patrol a certain alloted district.

Revolver in pocket, I watched my friend go. He carried a lighted lantern, but it was covered thickly and no light was visible as he went. Then I took up my wanderings.

For two hours I prowled about among the trees, and I did my duty well, I hope, but without zeal. Believing it was very unlikely that another blow would follow so quickly upon the first, I regarded the patrol as a waste of time, but Borrowdale's will was my law, so I trod along as soft-footed as possible, and left no room for self-accusation afterward.

Finally a well-known sound reached my ears, and I paused to drink it in without knowing why. The great clock in the village was striking midnight. I counted the strokes mechanically, and as the last died away I prepared to move on. Then I stopped, checked by a new sound

Did my imagination play me false or was it a groan? While I listened it was repeated, and I broke through a thin cover of bushes and seemed hard by it. A tree was there, and as the sound directed my attention to it, I noticed a peculiar something about its trunk. A few steps took me to the spot, and a filter of starlight revealed a man upright by the woody growth.

Strange gurgles now came from his mouth, and with only a few inches separating us I discovered more. From the odd shock of stiff hair rising above the bare head I recognized Ober, the gardener. My hands became busy and I found he was bound to the tree, but I whipped out my knife and severed the thongs. He would have fallen had I not caught him

"What is it?" I demanded. "Are you badly hurt, Ober?

"No, n-o-o!" trailed the reply. "Never mind me. They have gone—"

He was making a great effort to speak, but the words came falteringly.

"Who have gone?" I demanded. "Did they assault you?

"Leave me! They have gone—the [illegible] to attack the house!"

Then his head dropped and he lay senseless in my arms. I lowered him to a sitting position, and when I had braced him properly he sat easily by the trunk. No more was to be had from him, and though it seemed cruel to leave him, more pressing duty called me elsewhere. If the family foes had passed our picket-line they might even then be at the house, and, once there, it was impossible to say what damage they would do.

Taking quick thought, I decided upon my course. A superficial examination failed to reveal any serious injury to the gardener, so I felt compelled to leave him.

I took to my heels, running recklessly in the direction I believed Borrowdale to be, and, luckily, the course that took me toward the house. Fortune was with me. I soon came upon my friend, and, at once starting him along, I explained as we went.

"I didn't think it would come so soon," I exclaimed, as we rushed ahead at full speed.

"The time to strike is just when nobody would expect it," Borrowdale replied. "If you can outrace me, go! We don't know what may be happening to Miami now."

He gave me a chill, for I recalled that she was to be the first victim of the vendetta. I would have outstripped my companion, but he was going at great speed. And so we came to the house, finding it dark and silent.

"All may be well," I said hopefully.

"We don't know what is happening inside."

He whipped out his lantern and the light fell upon the front door. It fell upon more than that. In the wood a dagger was thrust deep, and under it was the design of a hand in red.

"We are too late!" Borrowdale gasped.

This capital story will be continued in the next issue of the Ledger. During the coming months many great stories will appear in these columns. If you are not already a subscriber for this paper, it will repay you if you send in a year's subscription. It costs you only $1.00, and you will never regret it. Let us hear from you at once.

* * *

Doris Lyndahl.

(Continued from page five.)

But Jake's apology was lost by increasing distance. The two were hastening in diverse directions. A few minutes later Lucy conveyed the precious parcel up to Doris's room, and, after a soft tap at the door, was promptly admitted. Before the maid withdrew, Doris cut the strings, unfolded many wrappers, and laid bare a veterinary book. Unobserved, she slipped from within its pages the paper currency that represented the value of her united checks. This done, she handed back to Lucy the book, twine, and addressed wrapper.

"This belongs to Jud," she explained. "Please give it to him with my thanks."

The message was somewhat mystifying, but Jud understood. This had been Doris's ruse for the safe delivery of her little fortune.

Next morning when Lucy served the eight o'clock breakfast, but one member of the family was in her accustomed place. Doris's chair, across from Madam Lyndahl's, stood in a flood of sunlight, but it remained vacant.

"Go," she ordered Lucy, "and call her at once."

Obediently the maid tripped up the stairway to the room above. After an unaccountable delay she sped back and entered the diningroom with face ashen and eyes distended.

"Mis' Doris ain't there," she cried. "She hain't been there! The bed's not touched!"

Next week's Ledger will contain the concluding chapters of this remarkable story. You will miss a great treat if you do not read it to the end. We will give you constantly the very best stories of entertainment that money will buy, so send in your subscription and take the Ledger regularly, if you are not doing so. You will not regret it.

* * *

VALENTINE'S DAY.

"I wonder who sent me this sweet valentine,
All fluffy and tinseled and gay;
Brought by the postman, and wrapped round with twine,
And addressed to 'Dear Little May!'

"Was it Willie? Or Bobbie? Or, maybe, Tom Hall?
They all are my dear playmates true.
Perhaps, though, it came from a girl, after all—
Oh, my! How I wish that I knew!

"A cute, dancing Cupid, a red bleeding heart,
A wreath of fair lilies entwined;
With here and there sprinkled a true-lover's dart
And it calls me 'My own Valentine!'

"Shy little Willie would hardly have dared
To send one so tender and true
While Bobbie—well, Bobbie's entirely too scared
To think, much less write, 'I love you!'

"And Tom? Why he'd never falter at all
In anything he wished to do,
So—what's that you say, you bad Brother Paul?
You know it was sent by AUNT SUE!'

* * *

The Kind of a Dog.

The following notice has been published in a Northern Peninsula paper by a French-Canadian:

"Loosed. One dawg. Been loose him bout three weeks. Him white dawg almost white with him tail cut off close next to her body. Anybody find her bring him to me. I belong to him and shall give good rewards for the same. Black spot on him nose about size fifty cents or dollar piece. Canada money or United States all the same. For yours truly with anxious, Felix Carno, hind side of Methody Church about three blocks in the house upstairs with green painting."

* * *

Their Prayers.

McCarthy got into an argument with Casey about the efficacy of prayer.

"Oi can't see that there's anything in it," asserted Casey, "Oi niver got anything out of it."

"Well," said McCarthy, "don't you know when there's a war it's always the people that pray that wins the foights?"

"How about the Chinese?" asked Casey. "They're great people to pray, and yet they got licked, and licked bad."

"Oh, well," explained McCarthy, "no wan could understand thim whin they prayed."

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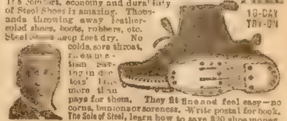

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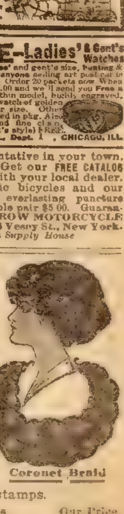

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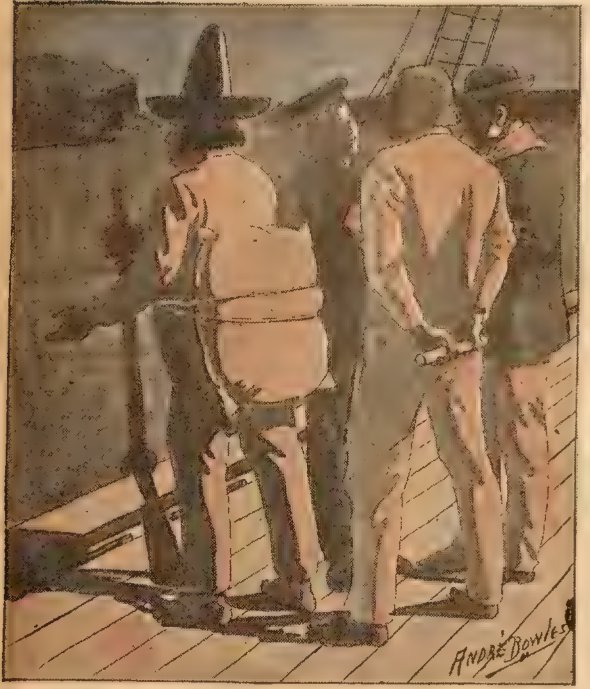
Jack Sewell's Fortunes

Or, Among the Pearl Islands

By St. George Rathborne



Pedro knew enough to take a lesson from one experience.

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CHAPTER XII.

DECEPTIVE QUIET.

UNDER ordinary conditions they might not have found much cause for anxiety in the fact that others had chosen to seek a harbor from the storm in the same retreat behind the big island as themselves; but having so precious a charge they naturally found cause for magnifying the danger.

The Gulf of California has an evil name, since it shelters many bands of filibusters and guerrillas, who have found other harbors too warm for their comfort. Those who are wise do not trust pilgrims found floating upon this lonely body of water, unless they can show a clean passport.

When Negrito's attention was called to the circumstance of the sentinel mast, he expressed grave concern, and insisted upon the weapons being overhauled, and a watch arranged for the night, fearing lest their presence might have become known to the strangers, who, believing them fair prey, would make a descent upon the felucca during the hours of darkness, and possibly under cover of the storm.

It would be madness to attempt to pass out of their snug harbor and seek another asylum, for at any moment the wind might begin to howl, and the gale break. This meant that they would have to spend the night in arms, ready to repel boarders if the expected attack materialized.

Pedro was puffed up with importance, and his very air seemed to say that none of them need fear the result so long as he, the mighty warrior, was near to defend them. He had loaded his great gun again, but refused to let Jack see what manner of missiles he poured into the gaping muzzle. What amused the boys most of all were the elaborate preparations Pedro made looking to a repetition of his cartwheel feat; for he had brought out one of the pillows belonging to the bunks, and this was strapped to his back, where his bruises were most in evidence. Pedro knew enough to take a lesson from one experience, and did not mean to gather a new crop of welts if he could by foresight prevent it.

As it seemed likely that those on the other vessel must have seen them enter behind the island, and had failed to pay them a friendly visit, Jack felt that the chance of their being law-abiding sailormen was a remote one. And Negrito considered it good policy to change their anchorage, since such a move might bother the others in case they tried to board. This was accordingly done, and in the utmost silence.

Then they waited to see what was about to happen, each man armed as for war, and with sleep far from his thoughts; for who could lie down and seek rest when for all any one knew they were on the eve of an eruption that might even exceed in fierceness the affair of the preceding night.

Negrito could not keep quiet, when there was a chance to investigate; and after they had been in their new position a little while he announced his intention of putting out to see what manner of neighbors they had.

Jack anticipated that the old chief would paddle the little dinghy while thus engaged in scouting; but in this he was mistaken, for Negrito simply placed his revolver in the keeping of the boys, saw that his keen knife was in his girdle, and then with a grunt slipped over the side. They saw him engulfed in the black water, and then he was gone like a shadow, with not a sound to betray his whereabouts. After all, this was by long odds the better way, if one had no fear of man-eating sharks, said to infest all these semi-tropical waters.

Since their number had been lessened by Negrito's move, it became necessary for those who were left to redouble their vigilance; and walking softly up and down the deck Jack and Oscar kept a keen lookout for any sign that would spell trouble.

How slowly the minutes dragged along! Anxiously they waited for the return of the chief with news concerning those who manned the other vessel beyond the big island. The thunder growled in the distance, the lightning continued to flash periodically, and yet Negrito did not come.

Once or twice Jack started, thinking he heard sounds of commotion beyond the rubber tree; but each time it turned out to be caused by a colony of egrets in a roost close by, and doubtless disturbed by some animal night prowler. He was really becoming quite anxious when he felt, rather than saw, an arm thrust out of the water and seize the gunwale of the boat

Instantly he had covered the moving object with his rifle; but there was no occasion for any further move, since he heard the voice of the chief, saying:

"Peace, amigos, I have returned."

He drew himself aboard the felucca, and paused to catch his breath, for in his return voyage he had met with the fierce tide drawing through the channel between the islands, and it had been a hard pull to make the boat.

"We will fight!" he said presently.

"Then they are guerrillas?" queried Jack, hazarding a guess

"Yes, senor, and of the worst. I know the man who leads, and he is a devil. It would be all over for us if they caught us asleep. But we know, and a surprise awaits the men from the lugger when they come. It will be warm I think," said the chief, with as near an approach to a chuckle as Jack had ever heard him give.

It was not a pleasant situation, and Jack did not fancy what was before them; for he was averse to scenes of bloodshed, and it looked as though they were fated to go through with another that might be even more serious than the event marking the preceding night.

Still, he had plenty of nerve, and tried to look at the thing in a common-sense light, for if these scoundrels, whose hands were against the Government, chose to turn pirates, and attempt to rob a peaceful vessel that had sought refuge from the storm behind these islands, they were beyond the pale, and one would be foolish to waste pity on them.

Would they attack before or after the storm? Perhaps Negrito had learned something of their plans, for he had evidently been alongside their vessel, and in a position to hear considerable of their talk. Jack put it to the old native, feeling that a knowledge of what was coming would doubly arm himself and Oscar.

Negrito was willing to tell all that he had learned. He had found it easy to swim around the island and approach the vessel, which he speedily saw was a heavily built lugger, of the type much in use among Mexicans. They appeared to keep a poor watch, doubtless under the impression that their presence in the vicinity was unsuspected, and that it was a waste of time to patrol the deck, or scrutinize the black waters around.

Hanging there Negrito had listened with keen ears, picking up a word, or perhaps a phrase, at a time, until he was able to frame a whole proposition, and knew to a certainty that these rough outlaws meant to bear down upon their neighbors later on and overwhelm them. Talk of possible booty gave the clew to their actions; for the sake of that they were ready to accept any risks and perform any manner of evil deed.

Jack shut his jaws hard when he heard all this, and no longer was he feeling a shrinking sensation creep over him at thought of the coming combat.

On the contrary, he experienced a fierce eagerness to meet these sharks of the gulf, and visit upon their heads the punishment they merited.

"When will they come, Negrito?" he asked, as the chief finished.

"If the storm breaks soon it will be then. By the middle of the night, anyway," was the answer he received.

The chief soon recovered his breath, and as if nothing had occurred he once more took up the watch, armed as before.

Half an hour passed thus. It could not long be delayed now, for Jack realized that after hanging about the horizon ever since night set in, the storm was moving swiftly up the heavens, and would presently break with redoubled fury on account of the delay. If the guerrillas attacked in the height of the blast, the conflict would have a dramatic setting, quite in keeping with its tragic nature.

Back in this sheltered harbor it would be possible to move about even in small boats without risk of capsizing; and because of this these desperate rascals had decided to surprise the crew of the stranger while they probably huddled below out of the fury of rain and wind.

Our friends took up their positions, hiding themselves as best they could back of the bulwarks and cabin top, and while most of their attention was taken up with the side of the island around

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which the chief had gone, they did not deem it good policy wholly to neglect the other, lest they be taken unawares.

With a swoop and a roar the gale swept down upon them, and a perfect flood of water deluged the deck; but this was only in the start, for erelong the rain abated, though the wind still tore along through the treetops with hurricane fury, and the sea beat against the rocky shores beyond with thunderous force, sending the spray high in the air.

It was then that Jack saw during a brief illumination of the surrounding waters, two boats loaded with a nondescript collection of ruffians, just rounding the tip of the big island, and heading straight for their anchorage. After all, their change of base availed nothing, since it was revealed by that electric torch in the heavens. No sound betrayed the approach of the desperadoes, and had our friends not been on the watch they must have fallen an easy prey to the boarding party.

Oscar had received his instructions, and when the boats were about halfway between the island and the felucca, he suddenly shouted in Spanish:

"Boat ahoy! Stand back there, or we will fire into you. This is a Government vessel. Approach nearer at your peril!"

The trick did not hoodwink those shrewd chaps, who must have scented rich spoils in the air; for realizing that they were discovered, and that it was folly longer to try the stealthy game, the occupants of the two boats gave vent to a chorus of vivas that could be heard high above the clamor of the storm, and pulled like mad for the object of their attack. They invited disaster, and they got what they deserved.

Oscar was the first to fire, and he sent in a charge of shot that must have bitten like molten lava, to judge from the shrieks of rage that followed. It did not stop the mad forward movement of the assailants, for in such a time of frenzied excitement these shot punctures were like unto the bites of gnats and mosquitoes, annoying but not deadly.

Negrito took up the refrain and sent in his regards, though just what damage his lead may have occasioned, Jack did not know, for he was too busily engaged himself about that time, pumping the contents of his Marlin at the leading boat crew, and seeking to do as much execution as possible.

The boats still rushed on, and just at that moment the scene was one Jack, at least, would never forget, with the storm serving as an accompaniment to the rattle of guns and the shouts of angry men. The situation was not without extreme peril to our friends, too, for if once these scoundrels managed to obtain a footing on the deck of the felucca, they might overwhelm the little crew by sheer force of superior numbers. And to add to the gravity of the crisis, the boats had separated, one aiming for the starboard quarter, and the other coming up on the port side.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE HORNET'S STING.

WHILE all this excitement reigned no one had remembered Pedro. It was all the more peculiar because the fat little native had intruded his personality in the affair of the preceding night, and with startling effect. Pedro, however, did not mean to be counted out when it came to action, and he was only biding his time, when he meant to jump into the breach with just as telling effect as on the other occasion. Perhaps he was also keeping one eye out for a softer place to land than before

This solicitude served to divide his attention, and may have accounted for the singular result that followed his shot. He held his fire until one of the buccaneer boats had drawn perilously near, and then, shutting his eyes, as a man will who flinches at the thought of a recoil on the part of his gun-cannon, he pulled the trigger.

The roar was just as great as on the other occasion, but Pedro, wise old dog that he was, simply fell back upon his pillow, and kicked his heels in the air, never once releasing that tenacious grip on his precious gun. Jack was astonished at the result, for the approaching boat was so close that the contents of the musket must have struck much after the manner of a cannonball, having had no chance to spread out.

When a man flinches upon firing a gun, he cannot expect to hit the bull's-eye every time, and Pedro was no exception to this rule; for his shot went low, and instead of decimating the ranks of the guerrillas, simply bored a vast hole through the stem of the boat. It could hardly have been better, even had he planned such a move, for immediately the sea began to rush in through the breach thus made, and in ten seconds the boat went down, leaving a set of sorely astonished rascals struggling in the water, and hardly knowing whether to swim ashore or continue the fight.

But the other boat had pressed on, and as there was no second edition of Pedro to puncture the planks or blow the heads off the crew, it came banging up against the side of the felucca, with a wicked assortment of greasers eager to spring on board, and waving all manner of terrible weapons, from horse pistols to machetes big enough to harvest a sugar-cane crop or chop kindling wood.

Jack and Oscar were there to meet them halfway. Unfortunately both boys had emptied their guns, and about the same could be said of their revolvers, so that as they faced this precious assortment of rascals all they had in the way of defensive measures consisted of clubbed weapons. Swinging their guns above their heads, they went at the game with a vim, and it took considerable of agility on the part of the guerrillas to avoid the downward rush of rifle or shotgun.

There must have been all of eight fellows in that boat, and once they strung out along the side, each making a desperate individual bid for recognition in coming aboard, it was manifestly a difficult job, to watch the whole bunch, and prevent their accomplishing their purpose.

Ah! but this was not taking into recognition the presence of Negrito, who was far from being asleep all the while. The chief did not fancy Pedro running off with all the laurels when it came to downright business in regard to burning the bridges behind the bold assailants, and he was on the alert for a favorable chance to see the fat native's little game and going him one better.

When he tossed his little bomb into the campfire of the head hunters at the time he and the boys were desirous of making the savages decamp from the hiding-place of the treasure-trové. Negrito was not exhausting his supply of those very interesting and highly useful persuaders.

He had waited for this very moment, so as to make sure to drop his contribution fairly and squarely into the bottom of the boat, after he had lighted the fuse by means of the cigarro he held between his thin lips—and this explained what had been a puzzling thing in Jack's eyes, as he had watched the chief lighting his weed before the battle opened, with more or less bewilderment

It was all over in a flash. Jack caught a shout of warning and fright from one of the men who scented the true nature of the danger; then came the half-muffled roar as the infernal machine was discharged, and the whole end of the boat was rent asunder, leaving some of the desperadoes clinging to the side of the felucca, while others dropped into the water.

The chief followed up his good work by hurling himself upon the nearest fellow who was desperately trying to clamber over the bulwarks, and giving him a cut from his knife that caused him to let go his hold and seek a safer asylum in the maw of the sea. Jack, too, was alive to the necessity of staving off these greedy spiders of the gulf, and urging on Oscar by voice and example he raged up and down the line, whacking away at every head that ventured to show above the boat.

There was really nothing for it but that the erstwhile valiant and exultant guerrillas must swim for the island, since they were denied a landing here; and thus did the attack, begun with such vigor, dwindle away until there did not appear to be a single assailant within reach upon whom to vent their wrath.

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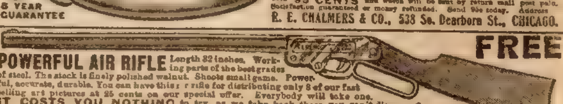

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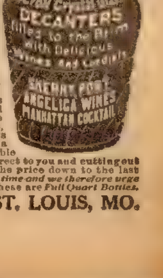

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Whenever the lightning flamed Jack looked shoreward and could see a group of the wretches huddled under the rubber tree, doubtless binding up their various hurts, while they compared notes and tried to understand what had struck them. Nothing was to be feared from that source, for their firearms had all been drenched in the flood, so that they were practically useless for the time being.

As he contemplated the various happenings of the last few days and nights, Jack Sewell considered that he had much to be thankful for, since fortune had smiled upon their efforts in a way hard to excel. Perhaps this was to be the last and deciding adventure in connection with the chase for the pearl treasure—at

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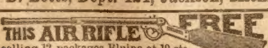

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least he sincerely hoped so, for this clamor of battle and running up against desperate men was not much to his liking.

He and Oscar had a deal to talk about as they sat there on guard, heedless of the fact that their clothes were soaked by the rain, and only determined that while they were still loitering in that snug harbor none of those rascals ashore should have an opportunity to creep aboard and play havoc.

Among other things Oscar had declared that he had seen old Pedro, their former host in the inn in Mazatlan, among those on board the yacht at the time of their engagement; and that the ex-smuggler was dancing quite as vigorously as his master after Pedro let fly with his blunderbuss of a gun, proving that even a hardened old chap of his build could pick out a few fancy steps, when a rusty nail or a buckshot or some such evil contrivance lodged in his lower limbs.

Perchance the younger Agrillo, the pompous captain of rurales, fared even worse, if he had been among those who were clustered about the bows of the yacht; at any rate, neither of our heroes saw any of these worthies more, for with that last meeting they passed below the horizon of their lives.

The storm like its predecessor was of short duration. Before morning it had blown itself out, and gone off growling toward the north. Negrito was not taking any chances, however, and with the first peep of day he gave orders that the felucca should be worked out of the channel on the tide, and sail made toward the south.

They saw no more of the guerrillas, who were busy at dawn getting aboard their lugger, and not interested in the strange little craft that had stung them with the fury of a hornet.

All that day and the next our friends kept flying southward, under favoring conditions. It was late on the third day, when they were nearing the city of Mazatlan, where Negrito expected to say good-by to the two brave lads who had been under his wing on this hazardous trip, that he called them into the cabin, leaving the helm in Pedro's hands.

They knew what was coming, and naturally felt a keen interest in the package that the old chief produced, understanding that he was about to deliver over his charge to their keeping at last. It was wrapped in oilskin, and apparently prepared with exceeding great care so as to resist the action of the weather; the chief had ere now taken it from still another receptacle, which had been of some metal composition known only to the people of his tribe, so that whatever was wrapped up inside all these protecting covers stood very little chance of injury.

When he smilingly opened the package, and revealed the quart measure of pearls lying there, in all their pristine beauty, just as they came from the shells of the precious oysters, both boys held their breath with delight. They could not guess at the value of the treasure, but knew it must be very considerable, and that the future was rosy indeed for them, with this gift of the grateful chief in their possession. That the pearls had far back in the past been taken from the fisher folks among the natives, piece by piece, and that it would be utterly impossible to discover who these people were whom the pirates robbed of their find—all this the boys already understood, so that they had no scruples about accepting the present Negrito insisted upon bestowing upon them.

The pearls were divided and secreted upon their persons; but it was their intention to get them into the hands of a responsible banker just as soon as they arrived in Mazatlan, for the enmity of Senor Jose might follow them even into the haunts of civilization, since he would be sore in spirit and body when he reached home again after his unfruitful expedition up the gulf. They changed their plans when it was found that in the harbor lay a steamer bound up the coast, an American vessel, too; and going immediately on board they made the acquaintance of the captain, found him a fine fellow, told him the whole story, and put their pearls in his keeping, taking passage for San Diego, California.

Jack parted from old Negrito with sincere regret, for during their brief but temptestuous acquaintance the chief had impressed him as a fine fellow; and it was more to oblige the boys than anything else that Negrito accepted a very few specimens from among the choice pearls that had been found in the cache at the foot of their rainbow.

As for Jack and Oscar, they never quitted California, liking the country so well that they invested money in a fruit ranch, becoming in a short time respected members of the lively community near San Diego.

Jack always declares it was the luckiest time of his life when he first ran across the old Mosquito Indian in the hands of those smugglers; and he never handles the little Marlin gun on his various hunts without smiling to recollect what a prominent place it had in winning for him the smiles of fortune.

In next week's Ledger will appear another rattling good story for boys, entitled, "Dick o' the Dark; or The Night Hawks of '76," by Captain Jack Judson. It is a thrilling story of fighting and adventure in the War of Independence. Don't let it get by you, for it is a good one.

The End.

The Cabalistic Hand

(Continued from page eighteen.)

a mysterious set of fingerprints to work on. We know our man."

"You take it for granted, I see, that Meteso is our unknown enemy, and that it's his fingerprints we have."

"Have you any doubts about it?" I asked in surprise.

"You couldn't hang a man on the evidence we have so far, could you Montague?" he replied, with a quiet shrug of the shoulders.

"No, but we have enough evidence to make it worth while to suspect him, and that simplifies the matter for us."

"I suppose Inspector McGonigle would straightway run Meteso in as a suspect, if he was in my place; but, Montague, it's never wise to be too sure. We've been thrown off the right scent several times now by suspecting the wrong person. There was Parks, then Fraser, and even Miss Dorothy."

"But they have led us to the right clew," I rejoined. "If we had never suspected Mr. Fraser, we might not have found Meteso. It was the coincidence of the fer-de-lance and the Cassiopeia plant that first made us acquainted with Meteso's looks. So our former suspects really helped us in unraveling the problem."

"I think," Maxine drawled, stretching himself, "you're going too fast, Montague. I don't see that we have unraveled much of the problem yet."

"No, but we're on the right clew."

"Possibly! Possibly!"

It was late, and we both needed the rest and refreshment of sleep.

"I think we'll board this window up a little before we retire, Montague. Somebody else might be tempted to enter in the night."

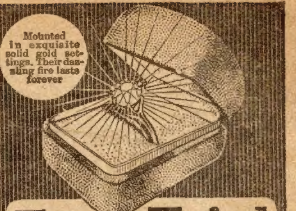
"You suspect Meteso may return?"

"No, Meteso got what he came for, and he won't bother us again tonight."

I found some old boards in the basement, and together we managed to patch up a shield for the broken window so that no one could get through without creating considerable noise. Maxine surveyed the window in silence, and then turned to me, and said:

"Good night, Montague! In the morning we will hunt up Meteso and ask him about the fer-de-lance he stole from Mr. Fraser's apartments."

(Continued next week.)



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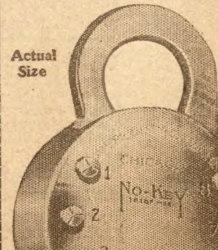

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The Palace of Doom

(Continued from page seven.)

way through the tangle of streets to the rear of the palace. No one had shadowed him so far as he could see, and once in the gardens, he hastened to the entrance, and a signal revealed the face of Feodor.

Xenia, who had not expected him, had retired, but Magda's voice at the door of her chamber hurried her from her couch, and, hastily dressing, she appeared to Paul. The keen ears of Ursus had heard nothing suspicious and the lovers were alone.

Xenia could not keep back from Paul the visit of Poniatowski; it had not left her mind for a moment, and all at once she began to speak of it. Paul's face flushed at the mention of the wooer's name.

"And you told him of our love?" he asked, pressing the white hand he held.

"I did not need to tell him," was the reply. "He knew of it, for when I rejected his advances he declared that he was as noble as the cowardly Major of the Preojenski Guards."

"Did Nicholas Poniatowski use those words?" cried Paul, with a start.

"I have correctly repeated what he said."

"Then I shall call the villain to account!"

"No," said Xenia, laying her hand on his arm. "Let the barking cur go, Paul."

"And have him spread near and far a report that I am afraid of such as he?"

"But, dear Paul——"

"Look me fairly in the face, my own," was the interruption. "Say truly if you would have me writhe under such biting lies."

She drew back and studied him for a moment.

"I would not have you harmed for the world," she exclaimed. "If you should meet Colonel Poniatowski and fall, who would stand between me and Catherine's passions?"

"You forget that I am accounted the best swordsman in the realm."

"But even the best fall," pleaded the Countess. "Listen to me, Paul. When brighter days come, as come they will, for I have prayed for them, you can wipe out this insult. Let it go till then."

"But the interval will be torture," was the reply. "This besotted favorite will parade his triumph everywhere."

"They who know you will not believe. All St. Petersburg knows that there is no braver soldier than Paul Daroski."

He would have answered her had not a hasty footstep sounded at the door, and Xenia sprang to her feet.

"What is it, Feodor?" she asked, as she looked into the servant's face.

"Count Orloff!"

The lovers stared at each other. It was past midnight, and the favorite of the Empress was at the door.

"Into yon room!" cried Xenia, pointing to an adjoining apartment. "Count Orloff comes from the great Empress. I feel it in my soul. He cannot want you, for he knows not that you are here. It is I whom he would see. Into my boudoir, Paul."

Meeting her gaze for a moment with refusal on his lips, Paul entered the room and shut the door behind him.

"Admit Count Orloff," said Xenia, turning to the waiting Feodor.

With heavy tread the giant favorite entered the room and threw a rapid look around. He was dressed in full regimentals, and a diamond-hilted sword swung at his side.

"I am glad to find you up, Countess," said he, after looking with some surprise at Xenia's garb. "I come from the Empress Catherine."

There was no reply.

"I am the bearer of her majesty's commands," and from his bosom the Count took a paper which he deliberately unfolded.

Xenia was standing erect with one fair hand resting on the table in the middle of the room. The light fell upon her beautiful face and disclosed it fully to the man before her.

She had always feared this man. There was something in Gregory Orloff to be dreaded. His life had been passed in the service of the great Empress, and, moreover, he was known for his secret cruelties. He brooked no rivals, and those whom he hated either disappeared among the snows of Siberia or wasted their lives in the dungeons of the fortress of Peter-and-Paul.

A dead silence fell between the pair after Orloff's announcement. The paper that dangled from the Count's hand seemed fraught with doom.

"I need not read the ukase," he suddenly continued. "It is fresh from the Empress's hand."

"I will read it, Count," said Xenia, reaching out her hands. "I will read what our great Empress has written concerning me."

The very coolness of this young girl startled Orloff. There was not a sign of fear about her. The hand which she thrust forth did not waver. In the name of Heaven, what was sustaining Xenia Carloff?

"You will save me a disagreeable duty," returned Orloff. "If you will read the ukase, my dear Countess——"

She took the document from his hand and thus broke his sentence.

"Put yourself at your ease, my dear Count," she said, turning halfway round so as not to show him a full face. "I see the ukase is not lengthy."

Narrowly he watched her while she bent herself to the task before her. The silence was unbroken save by the deep breathing of the beautiful Russian.

All at once a cry welled from Xenia's lips. It was a cry which she tried hard to keep back, but in spite of her firmness it came forth and seemed to echo throughout the house. She whirled upon him with the whitest of faces and extended the paper.

"The Empress is merciless," said she, looking into the marble face of Gregory Orloff.

"But always just," was the reply.

"When shall I go?"

The girl was herself again.

"Tomorrow night at ten," was the answer. "You see there is no haste, my dear Countess. You will not be bothered with fellow passengers. The Empress has granted you the honor of going away in state if you so desire."

"But it is Siberia all the same."

A sinister smile for a moment darkened the face of Orloff. He returned the ukase to his bosom and stepped back. At that moment the door of Xenia's boudoir was thrown open and Paul stood forth.

"You?" cried Gregory Orloff, with a sudden start. "You in this house at this hour?"

"My presence answers you!" was the fearless answer. "I have overheard enough to know that the Empress has struck again."

Count Orloff bit his lips.

"When you return to the Winter Palace, say to Catherine for me that I, too, desire to face the snows of Siberia, since she has sentenced to them this innocent woman," and twining his arm about Xenia's waist, he drew her gently to his side.

"No, no, Paul!" cried the girl. "Let me suffer for our love. Let me journey to Siberia and in its depths ever think of your love."

"Nay, dear. I will force the Empress to include me in the exilement. Bear to her, Count Orloff, the message and defiance of Paul Daroski. I have refused to become the slave of her base passions. I have rejected promotion and the Iron Eagle. I have spurned her love, if love it may be called. Tell her that Paul Daroski would sooner rot in Siberia than feel upon his brow the kiss she gives to her favorites. Tell her——"

"Paul! Paul!" cried Xenia, grasping his arm. "Do not incense the Empress beyond hope."

"I have no hope but to go whither thou goest, dear," was the reply. "Count Orloff will see the Empress ere it is day. I command him to repeat my words to her. I care not to serve longer the Semiramis of the Snows, and here I break my sword sooner than draw it again in her service!"

Before the white-faced girl could restrain him, he whipped his sword from its scabbard and flung it broken in twain at Orloff's feet. Xenia uttered a piercing cry and fell fainting into Paul's arms, whilst upon Orloff's face sat victory enthroned and triumphant. With Paul disgraced his position was secure.

This strange story leads to very extraordinary situations and dramatic episodes. The reader will find it eminently worth reading to the end. Next week's Ledger will contain further chapters of it. The surest way to get the Ledger is to subscribe for it and have it come to your home regularly. Today is a good time to attend to this.

* * *

Willie No Duck.

During the heavy rains some time ago, a teacher in a Columbus school noticed that one of her pupils was absent.

The boy gave no satisfactory excuse when he appeared the next day, so the teacher wrote a note to his mother, asking why Willie had been out of school.

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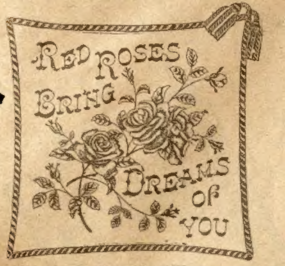
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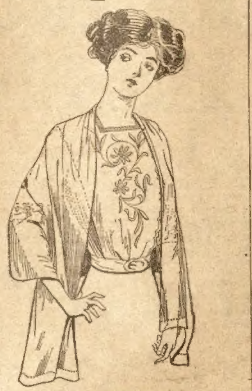

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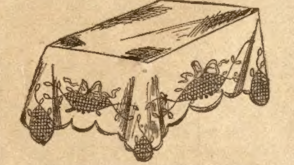

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About midnight the whole town was startled by the furious ringing of the church bell. An old colored man was sent by the proprietor to see what was the matter. Soon he came shambling back.

"Massa Boss!" he exclaimed. "Massa Boss! Jes' ca'm yo'se'f. 'Twan't nothin' but de gemmen in pew twenty-six ringin' fo' a drink!"

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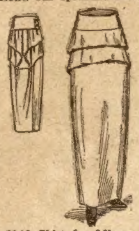

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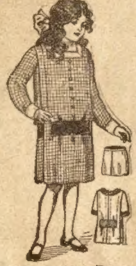

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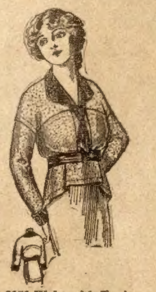

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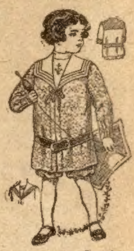

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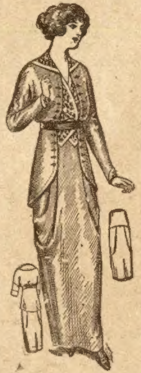

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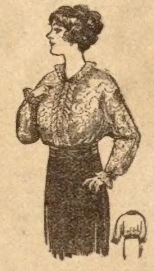

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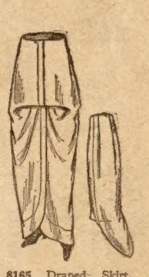

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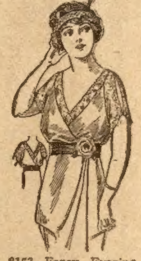

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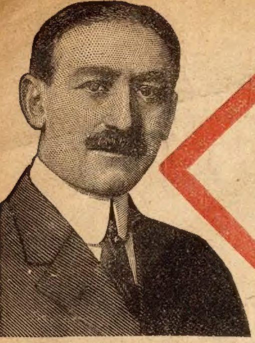

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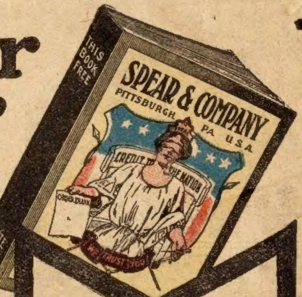

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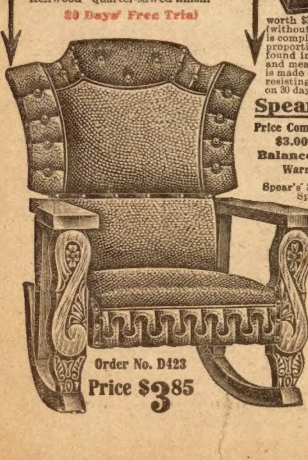
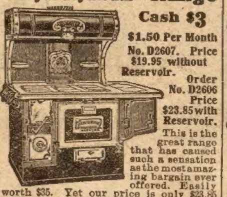
A large, roomy, comfortable, well made Rocker with wide, high back, fully tufted and buttoned. The seat is large and roomy and upholstered with high-grade black Sylvan leather over full steel springs and has beautiful ruffled edge to match back. Construction is solid hard wood throughout, high gloss, golden oak, "Kenwood" quarter-sawed finish.

30 Days' Free Trial



Order No. D423
Price $3.85

Spear's Famous New "Royal Plymouth" Range



Cash $3
$1.50 Per Month

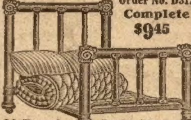
No. D2607. Price $19.95 without Reservoir.

Order No. D2606 Price $23.85 with Reservoir.

This is the great range that has caused such a sensation as the most amazing bargain ever offered. Easily worth $35. Yet our price is only $23.85 (without reservoir, $19.95). Every feature is complete and perfect. Oven is of same proportions and construction features found in the very highest priced ranges and measures 18 inches square. The body is made of Spear's celebrated P.P.P. rust-resisting steel. Full nickel trimmed. Sold on 30 days' Free Kitchen Trial.

Bed, Mattress, Spring, Pillows

Order No. D312
Complete $9.45



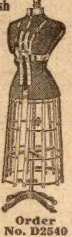
30 Days' Free Trial

Cash, $1.50 Balance, Monthly 75c

This handsome, complete Metal Bed Outfit, consisting of heavy, perfectly constructed Iron Bed, any color, 4 feet 6 inches wide; a good woven wire spring with all steel frame; 50-pound cotton top mattress; 2 feather pillows. This is one of the great bargains that has made Spear famous the world over for the most remarkable low furniture prices to be had anywhere.

Spear's Latest "Crown" Adjustable Dress Form

Price $12.45
$1.50 Cash
Balance 75c Monthly



This great new style dress form makes dressmaking easy and a pleasure. Helps you to dress in up-to-date fashion at small cost. Eliminates the discomfort of being fitted. Quickly solves every difficulty and does away with guess-work, disappointment, and saves expense and waste of valuable material.

The following adjustments are possible: Bust measure, 32 to 43 in.; Neck measure, 12 to 15 in.; Waist measure, 20 to 31 in.; Hips, 35 to 49 in.; Length of back, 13 to 16 in.

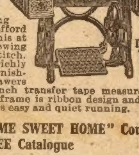
Order No. D2540
30 Days' Free Trial

Spear's "Steinway" Sewing Machine

Price Complete, only $18.45
$3.00 Cash—Balance, $1.25 a Month
Warranted 10 Years

Order No. D3209

All Attachments Given FREE



30 Days' Trial Free

Spear's 5-Drawer "Steinway Special" Sewing Machine is an improved Drop Head style. No sewing machine agent could afford to sell a machine like this at such a price. Full-sized sewing head for double lock stitch. Woodwork is golden Oak, richly embossed design, high varnished finish. Four side drawers and center drawer. 18-inch transfer tape measure on front of table. The iron frame is ribbon design and full ball bearing which insures easy and quiet running.

Be Sure to Send "HOME SWEET HOME" Coupon for FREE Catalogue

→ SPEAR & CO. ←
Dept. C, Pittsburgh, Pa.

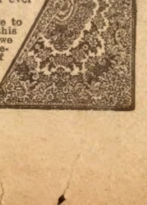
Spear's Room-Size Brussels Rug Bargain

Only $11.95 **$1.50 Cash—Balance, 75c Per Month**

Order No. D4736

Beautiful, high color Brussels Rug, red rose design, with green leaves and tan ground. Guaranteed full 9-wire Tapestry Brussels with wool facing. This is the greatest genuine Brussels Rug value you ever saw.

It is perfectly safe to order direct from this advertisement, as we positively will refund your money if on receipt you are not perfectly satisfied with your bargain.



Size 9x12

Spear's "HOME SWEET HOME" Coupon

SPEAR & CO.
Dept. C, Pittsburgh, Pa.

I would like to know all about the Spear Open Account, Easy Payment Plan for home furnishing. Please send me, free, your complete Bargain Catalogue with Prices, Terms and Information, without the slightest obligation on my part.

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